Never Cry Werewolf

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Never Cry Werewolf

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Summary

The residents of Godric's Hollow never could have imagined the horror to follow Tom Riddle's arrival in their sleepy little town.

When a Stranger Comes to Town

"So," Cedric chirped brightly from the driver's seat of his bee-yellow sedan, "have you met your new neighbor yet?"

Harry stared at the taller boy, perplexed. Had he met his new neighbor yet? No. Because he hadn't even realized that he *had* a new neighbor until right that very moment and only because he'd said something about it. "Uh…no?"

"You didn't notice, did you?" Sheepishly the raven shrugged. Cedric chuckled and pushed his sunglasses back up the bridge of his nose. One handed, he turned the wheel and the beaten car hummed as it turned the corner onto their street. "How anyone can overlook a moving van, especially one parked outside of Hill House as the thing has been empty for years, I'll never know."

His second shrug turned into more of a roll of his pointed shoulders halfway through. "You know me, Cedric. I always have my head in the clouds, one way or another, writing my 'wizard tales'."

"Your 'wizard tales' will sell for millions and make you a very rich man." Harry blushed and ducked his head, turning to look out the passenger side window at the street. They were passing Hill House now, its imposing form-decrepit yet still somehow inexplicably imposing-stark against the cloudless blue sky of the brief Alaskan summer. Cedric maneuvered around the moving truck which seemed to take up half the street. Oddly enough, despite the open back of the truck being filled to the brim with furniture and sealed boxes, there was no one in sight to bring the items inside.

The long term residents of Godric's Hollow had always considered Hill House to be haunted, and for good reason. Murders. Suicides. Accidents. One way or another, whoever owned it always seemed to somehow end up very *very* dead within ten years. No one native to the area really wanted to live there and as such it had stood empty for almost forty years. It's need for repair was dire.

And its new owner was, beyond a doubt, an outsider. Something which would prove either amazing or disastrous.

"Any reason that you're bringing them up?"

"Him, Harry. *Him*." The friendly teasing in his tone left the raven rather weary. "I haven't seen or spoken to him myself but Cho told me that she saw him coming in this morning; tall dark and handsome?"

"And considerably older if he's bought a house for himself especially a house in a state like *that*." He said as Hill House disappeared behind them. "If I didn't know better Diggory I would swear that you're trying to set me up with him!"

Harry was into men. By now, that much was no secret and everyone who knew him had long since accepted and adjusted to that fact. He'd asked Cedric out the year before: the taller, blonde male was as straight as he was handsome and had turned him down gently. They'd settled into a comfortable friendship after that.

"Well, you're hardly making much relationship progress on your own, Potter. I figured you could use a bit of help."

The raven huffed as the car rolled to a stop in his driveway. "God, Cedric, you're worse than my Godfather and my mother combined!"

That did nothing to stop the other boy from erupting into peels of good natured laughter. "At least talk to him?"

"If you think my mother will let me off without doing that you've lost your mind completely. If it isn't homemade baked goods it'll be for the typical 'hello neighbor, I'm gay-I mean Harry-nice to meet you' because we both know how *brilliant* I am with words." Between his calculus homework and his impending 'social outing' the next hour would not be 'fun' by any definition of the word. "Thanks for the lift home."

"No problem. It's on the way anyway. See you later?"

"We do have have another week left of school."

"Isn't that the sad truth? Good luck with your homework. And your introductions."

Harry grumbled under his breath and pushed the car door shut with a bang. Slinging the strap of his bag over his shoulder he began the trek up to his house and, after briefly fumbling with the keys, walked in through the front door. The smell of chocolate chip cookies slammed into him immediately afterwards; relieved, he dropped his school bag with a thud and strode into the kitchen.

"Hey Mom."

His mother, Lily, stood in front of the stove with an apron on and her long crimson hair secured behind her back. "Hello, love. Welcome home." Her green eyes were the same color as his and there was a smear of flour and chocolate across one of her cheeks.

"Are those for our new neighbor?"

"Yes, darling. They'll be done in twenty minutes; would you mind taking them over?"

"I will, as soon as I finish my homework; can you let me know when they're done?" Harry picked up an apple from the fruit bowl and rubbed it on the front of his shirt. He knew his mother preferred it when the fruit they ate was *actually* washed but, though she sent him a sharp look, said nothing.

"I will. Go work on your assignment love."

Was he excited about Math? Absolutely not. Did he want to get it the hell over with? Yes. And quickly. And that was why Harry grabbed his schoolbag from where he'd left it beside the door and rushed up the stairs. Twenty minutes later he'd managed to hammer out most of his assignment and he'd dearly wanted to light his book on fire. True to her word his mother called him down and handed him a large decorative plate of piping hot cookies with orders to take them down to Hill House.

Harry was out the door and headed up the block moments later, forcing himself not to think about all of the stories regarding the property. Superstitions were just that, after all. Superstitions. Stories. Not real. Coincidences at most.

He was only marginally successful in doing so.

Harry edged around the open back of the moving truck and peered inside. Nothing seemed to have been moved between the time he'd seen the truck in Cedric's car until now. The crumbling face of Hill House made the building look forlorn and empty, its porch sagging to one side like an unhinged jaw flapping in the wind and windows staring blankly into empty space.

Movement out of the corner of one eye made him jump and look up. Nothing was there, but the sun-bleached curtain was rippling as if in a draft. Or as if it had recently been moved.

A cold shiver passed through him, goosebumps erupting over his skin from head to toe. Feeling as if he was being watched Harry picked up his pace and all but bounded onto the porch. The rotting wooden planks bowed beneath his weight but didn't break.

When he reached up to knock the door swung open with the squeak of unoiled hinges. A draft, cold and dry and heavy with the smell of dust and sweet rot, broke over him like a wave as he stepped hesitantly over the threshold and looked around. There were two pairs of prints left behind in the thick lair of dust which had gathered across the floor along with every other surface. One from a pair of fine men's boots. The other from what appeared to be a large dog. The interior was dim and there were no other signs of life.

"Hello?"

A black shape came tearing around the corner with a snarling growl and launched itself down the hall at him. Strings of drool flying from its viciously snapping jaws. Harry yelped, stumbled backwards and fell into the door which had swung shut behind him with a thump. The massive beast crouched low, preparing to leap for his throat and tear it out and-.

"*Nagini!"* The owner of the house had appeared on the stairs like some sort of specter, dressed in leather and denim with nary a hair out of place. His peculiar crimson eyes seemed to glow in the half light of the house. "That's more than enough. He's welcome here."

Harry didn't expect reasoning with a vicious animal to work and was about to say as much but to his utter shock the dog instantly went quiet and sat down.

"Forgive her." The man had begun to descend the steps with the soft clank of steel-toed boots. "She and I have been companions for a very long time and she tends to be a bit

overprotective. Nagini is a good dog and meant nothing by it." He sent the dog a pointed glance. "Did you?"

Nagini whined and, as he came to a stop at the base of the stairs, lay down at his feet. Harry stared at the suddenly placid dog in total shock.

"It's almost like she understands you." He knew that it was stupid to think that but it was the only way that he could possibly word it.

The man didn't seem to think so. At least not too much. He smiled, revealing perfect white teeth, and chuckled. The tone was dark and satiny and did absolutely nothing to assist with his sudden red face and dry mouth. "You could say that she does. In a way." He extended a hand, large and long fingered, towards him. "Tom Riddle."

"Harry." He managed after a moment's flailing, shifting the weight of the plate onto his arm and taking the offered hand. His grip was strong but not painful and his palm was warm and calloused. "Harry Potter. I…if you don't mind me asking-?"

"About my eyes? A birth defect; don't feel ashamed for your curiosity Harry. I get asked such things often. I take it you're one of my new neighbors?"

"Yes. My mother made some cookies for me to bring over as a way to welcome you to the area. I'm guessing that you're not from around here?" For daring to move into this house. And certainly for having an accent the likes of which he'd never heard before.

"Not from around here? I'd say that's a reasonable enough description given that I come from across the pond. A small town in the heartland of Great Britain." He released his hand and took the plate. Harry was very much relieved to be freed from its weight. "Shall we have a seat and enjoy these while they're warm? I'm afraid that I haven't yet gotten around to dragging in the table or the chairs but we can sit in my truck if you'd like?"

It was better than playing Russian Roulette with that one floorboard which wouldn't be capable of holding his weight. "Sure."

Tom's smile grew slightly larger and he motioned to the door. "After you."

Nagini leapt up the instant that Harry opened the door and bolted out after him, tearing around the side of the house and out of sight.

"Well, she certainly seems eager."

"She always seems eager." The creaking of the porch did nothing to faze the brunet and he crossed it without batting an eye, pulling a set of car keys from the pocket of his bomber jacket as he did so. Harry thought it was a bit hot for jackets at the current time of year, but then again it had been a good bit cooler inside of the house.

Nagini had already jumped up into the open tailgate of the massive dark green pickup which sat in the driveway behind the house atop which a pair of bull horns had been bolted. The truck chirped when the button to unlock it was hit. Harry moved around to the passenger side

as Tom slid into the driver's seat and placed the plate on the middle arm rest. The seats were deep and upholstered in slate grey leather. A dark green snake hung from the mirror, an odd choice for a shaped air freshener but to each their own, and the interior was shockingly clean considering that it belonged to a single man of nearly thirty.

The truck smelled like leather and spice and Tom-wood smoke, pine and why the hell did he know how the man smelled when he hadn't even known him for five minutes?-and Harry couldn't stop himself from staring as Tom removed his jacket, putting his powerful forearms on display. The bottom of his shirt rucked up over his washboard stomach as he turned around to push up the back window and allow Nagini to stick her head through and make off with a couple of cookies.

"Chocolate is bad for dogs."

"She'll be fine. She's eaten worse before." He picked up one of the cookies and took a bite. Harry had to force himself to look away. "These are delicious. You said your mother made them?"

"She did. "He said. "So, Nagini…is she a German Shepherd or something?" To him, she looked much more like a wolf.

"Something." He answered. "Pass along my compliments, if you would? And my thanks."

"Of course."

They ate in silence for a while. Half of the plate was gone by the time neither of them could eat anymore and Nagini had shoved her muzzle down his shirt to goad Harry into petting her, much to Tom's obvious amusement.

"I hate to ask, honestly, but there's so much in that truck that I doubt I could finish all of it tonight on my own and I'd like to at least put the master bed and bath to rights. Would you mind?"

"Oh, no. Not at all." Harry straightened up quickly in his chair, earning an unhappy grumble from Nagini who turned and jumped back out of the trunk. "Hill House is an awful shape; you'll need help with the renovations?"

"Are you offering?"

Anything to get to know the man better. Most specifically which team he played for and whether or not newly eighteen was too young for his range. "It's only the neighborly thing to do, isn't it?"

There was a knowing glint in his eyes but he simply smiled back and nodded his head. "Yes, quite. The neighborly thing to do." He pushed his door open and stepped out. "Leave the plate in the car. I'll come grab it once I have a trustworthy place to put it."

Harry nodded and followed after him, appreciatively taking advantage of his position to stare at what was visible of Tom's back through the thin cotton of his shirt. If anything the man

looked even better under the sunlight without the jacket than he did with it, the sunlight made his pale skin gleam like alabaster beneath the intricate black detailing of his sleeve tattoos.

From this angle he couldn't make out what the image was, but thought it was a howling wolf against a backdrop of pines.

The only jewelry that he wore was a golden ring inset with a large black stone, but Harry thought that he'd look incredible with one of those Helix piercings which Dudley had gotten just to spite his parents.

"We'll just take them all into the big room off the front entrance; you saw it I'm sure? The furniture will be for last as that will be the most difficult part." He brushed his chestnut curls back from his face. "Sound good?"

"Yeah." Harry said as Tom hoisted himself up into the truck.

"I'll pass them down and after we've gotten all of the boxes out we'll start to take them into the house."

Tom passed him the first pair of boxes. Something metallic rattled around and Harry almost dropped them when the weight took him by surprise.

"So Harry, tell me, what do you do?"

"Me?" he repeated, surprised as he set the box down. "I'm a high school senior. Eighteen. I usually work odd jobs over the summer around the neighborhood for a bit of pocket money. That sort of thing."

"Odd jobs? Marvelous. I'll be having a lot of those for you to help me with; I'll pay you for those and for this as well." He said. "Sound agreeable?"

He'd be practically employed by Tom? All of summer by the look of the state of the house? This was perfect! "That'd be great, Tom. But you really don't have to pay me. I'm happy to help."

"And I'm happy to give you something in return." How Tom could lift four boxes at a time and still not break a sweat Harry had no idea. "If nothing else, feel free to come around at any time; the key will be under the mat."

"Anytime?"

"Day. Night. Morning. To hang out. Hide from your parents. Hide from your fan girls."

"I wish I was popular enough to have to hide from fans. Though I'd much rather they be fan boys."

"No you don't. Trust me. It's easy to get rid of the woman, at least the ones with any sense, by telling them you're gay. The men…not so much." He leapt down, landing gracefully beside him.

“You-?”

“Prefer the D? Yes.” How Tom could be so blasé about telling such a thing to a near total stranger when telling his own parents and closest friends had been the single most embarrassing experience in his entire life Harry would never know. “What, upset that you’re no longer the only one who’s bent? With the way that you’ve been staring at me I'd thought you’d be relieved.”

He’d noticed? Harry hastily picked up the nearest box and hid behind it. “Why do you think that we’re the only two around?”

“We’re in the middle of bloody Alaska, one of the most isolated places on earth aptly called the last frontier, in a town with a population of about two thousand people. Given that ‘the Gays’ only make up about 4% of the total population of the United States there can’t possibly be *that* many of us around here.”

Well he did have a point in that.

“So,” Harry asked as he followed Tom back inside, setting his box down with a huff. “What do you do for a living Tom?”

“I’ve done a few things. Everything from office work to modeling.” He could certainly believe that. “But between my savings and inheritance I no longer need to work. Do you plan to go to college Harry?”

“Oh, no. I want to be an author actually.” He told him. “The people who have read my work think it’s pretty good.”

“I’m certain that it is. I’d like to see some of it eventually if you wouldn’t mind?”

“I might bring something by someday.”

By the time all of the boxes had been brought in and all of the furniture had been placed Harry felt as if he’d been bench pressing for four hours straight. Tom seemed entirely unaffected, leading the raven to wonder just how ridiculously fit the man was.

“Thank you for your help, Harry. It was good meeting you.” He watched him dismount the steps from the porch and head back down the block and out of sight. Only then did he allow his smile to curve into a brutal smirk. *Of all the places where I could ever have stumbled across you again, my legionnaire, I never thought it would be here.*

The 'Nice Guy'

“Harry, mate, where are we going?”

The raven grinned at his best friend as Ron walked beside him, the two girls trailing not too far behind. “You’ll see: not too much further now. We’re just going to see my new neighbor so that I can introduce the lot of you.”

“A new neighbor?” Ginny repeated. “I didn’t think that any of the houses in the neighborhood were up for sale.”

“Don’t you think that dropping in on him uninvited, especially with friends, is a bit out of line? You can’t possibly know him well enough for that if he’s just moved in.”

“God ‘Mione, whatever happened to Northern Hospitality?”

“I wouldn’t call it uninvited.” Harry said, amused.

“Did he tell you to come over? To bring company with you?”

“Well, his exact words were ‘the key is under the mat’ but I figure that that’s close enough.” Hermione looked flabbergasted while Ron happily exclaimed over the news, no doubt envisioning a party house of some kind. “Toms a great guy. English, lives with his dog, Nagini, she might try and go after you like she did me but I’m sure he’ll call her off.” He could see the driveway by now; the big green truck was nowhere to be seen. “Oh, it looks like he isn’t home at the moment.”

“We’re still going to go inside?” Ginny asked, her attention on retrieving her phone from her bag so that she didn’t see what house they were headed to. Ron, however, stopped dead and Hermione faltered slightly.

“*Hill House*, Harry? Are you crazy?”

“Yes, Hill House. No, I’m not crazy. Yes, we are still going inside.” He said. “Come off it, Ron. It’s not like its dark outside or that we’re making you go in alone. The stories about Hill House can’t possibly be true.”

Never mind that he’d been terrified of the House himself just the day before. Now that he knew Tom lived there, however, the horrifying house was suddenly so much more appealing.

He’d fight his way through an entire army of ghosts and ghouls if it meant a chance to speak to, or even just stare at, Tom Riddle. Did that make him a stalker? Maybe. Did he care?

Probably not, though even about that he couldn’t be entirely sure.

“Come on.” He encouraged them a final time before starting up the drive. Ginny and Hermione exchanged an unnerved glance between each other before he hesitantly followed him. Ron, not wanting to be left alone out there on the street, hurried after the other three.

Between the time that he’d last been there and now a generic brown bristle Welcome mat had been tossed carelessly down onto the porch. Harry peeled the corner back and as promised found a spare house key gleaming up at him against the spongy wood. He picked it up and straightened, sliding it into place and turning the lock.

The front door clicked and swung open with the same dull creak that he’d heard yesterday. Mindful of the weakened floorboards but otherwise devoid of the nerves he’d had the day before Harry stepped confidently into the dim front room. Hermione, Ginny and Ron followed and the door swung shut behind them.

Most of the boxes still stood in the room where they’d left them, open but unemptied. The stairs had been ripped up, tools and fresh wood standing as evidence to the start of Tom’s repairs.

A small spider skittered along the wall and Ron let out a shriek, all but leaping into the arms of his friend.

“Oh, calm down Ronald!” Hermione sounded rather exasperated by the entire affair. “It’s only a wolf spider.”

Harry could barely hide a laugh behind a cough, claiming it the fault of the dust and receiving an odd look from Ginny for his trouble. Tom just seemed to be surrounded by wolves in some form or another. Wolf tattoos. A wolf like dog. And now wolf spiders.

“Come on; most of the house isn’t really stable but the kitchen is alright and we managed to bring in most of the furniture yesterday.” He started down the hall. “We can sit at the table and wait for him to come back.”

The kitchen table which Tom had brought with him was a beautiful antique piece; brindle wood polished to a meticulous mirror sheen. The chairs were slightly darker in tone, throne like and with carved backs. They looked out of place amidst the otherwise slowly melting room.

Ron’s eyes went immediately to the fridge, a stainless steel double doored monstrosity humming away in the corner of the room. “Do you think he’d mind if we helped ourselves to some of his food?”

“I doubt that there’s anything in there, Ron. He said something about only getting the electricity and water working today.” Harry said. “Now that I think about it, he’s probably at the market now.”

The redhead’s stomach voiced its displeasure with the matter, turning Ron’s face slightly pink and causing the girls to giggle.

“While I was helping him move in the boxes and the furniture we talked about exactly how much work he thinks this house will need. I’ve already agreed to help with the renovations; I declined pay when he offered, but I’m sure he’d be happy to pay you if you’d help as well. If you’re available.”

“Hermione’s got all of her pre-college work to do and Ginny and I both already have summer jobs lined up. Sorry mate.”

“I figured as much, but that there wouldn’t be any real harm in asking.” He said. “I should probably tell you before Tom shows up, his eyes are a little bit…surprising. Their coloring, I mean. When I asked about it yesterday he said it was a birth defect so…”

“No commenting on your new crush’s disfigurement,” Ginny smirked, “got it.”

Any reply which Harry might have made to that comment was cut off by the crunch of heavy tires against pavement. He sat up straighter.

“I’m going to go and let him know we’re here so that he can keep Nagini from savaging anyone.” He certainly didn’t want a repeat of the day before. Both the dog’s ferocity and Tom’s almost supernatural control over her were more than a little bit unnerving. No one said anything in response and he hurried out the back door.

At the sound of the door banging shut behind him both man and dog turned their heads. Tom broke out into a dazzling smile. Nagini wagged her tail, trotting up to him and nudging her nose into his hand.

“Harry.” The raven couldn’t stop himself from shuddering at his purring tone, pleasant tingles zinging through him like pins and needles. “Come here often?”

“I’d like to. If you don’t mind having me that is.” He stepped up to the truck as the brunet closed the door behind him.

“What makes you think I would when I’ve all but given you a key?” Tom passed a bag of groceries to Nagini, who delicately took it from his hands, then lifted out another and handed it to Harry. “Have a good day at school?”

“A typical one. You know: boring classes and boring teachers.” He said. “I can’t wait until I’m done.”

“I remember my own schooling, long ago as it was. It was a bit more…well, I hesitate to use the word ‘arcane’ so let’s simply call it different shall we?” His crimson eyes locked with his and something within his mind jerked. Briefly, it were as if he were falling into his bloody eyes, but then Tom looked away. “You brought friends with you.”

A statement. Not a question. Almost as if…he’d read his mind. Not that such a thing was possible of course but still…

“We usually walk home together because we all live fairly close by. I just figured that they should meet you as soon as possible so as to avoid questions later, I…”

Tom laid a hand on his shoulder, long fingers applying a soothing pressure. Working into his muscle and bone in just the right way to make him melt. “It’s understandable that you’d want to bring your pack to meet a new friend. It’s quite alright.”

He didn’t seem to be quite as thrilled by the situation as his words would suggest. *Pack?* Harry’s mind caught on that one word. Out of all the descriptors that he could have used he’d settled on what was quite possibly the single most bizarre one for such a thing that Harry had ever heard. *Well, I suppose that I already knew he was a little odd.*

Not that that stopped his rampant near obsession with the man.

“Shall we go inside, then, so that you can introduce us?” Tom released his shoulder and pulled a cask of beer from the bed of the truck. “After you.”

The second time that Tom had done that. He was either polite to a fault in that regard or… was using it as an excuse to watch him.

Nagini growled at the other as she entered at Harry’s side but made no other aggressive moves towards them and dropped her bag onto the lopsided island. Tom kicked the door closed behind him with just a bit too much force and wove around the scattered furniture, his movements possessing a near animal grace.

A bag of chips came out of one of the grocery bags and the cask was opened with the sound of ripping card board. It, along with a can of beer, went flying towards Ron who caught them on reflex.

“Help yourselves. Let’s get to know each other.” Again that slight edge was there. Gelid. Possessive. Evidently Tom didn’t like sharing. Or felt threatened.

Why?

Another can was tossed to Harry, the slap of aluminum against his palms pulling him from his stupor.

“Ladies?”

“Wha-! We aren’t of age! Providing alcohol to minors is a felony: Harry’s father is a cop!” Hermione blustered as Ginny accepted her can with an obvious wariness.

Harry looked mortified by her outburst. Tom only laughed and popped his own can open with a loud crack.

“My dear, I may not be from Alaska but I am from a small town-a town a good deal smaller than this one in fact-and I’m well aware of the sort of things which kids get up to; your grandparents did it, your parents did it and I’m bloody sure you’ve had a drink or two before now as well.” He drained his can in a single gulp before popping another one open with a lupine grin. “I’m sure that they’d all much rather you do this sort of thing at someone’s home than in public anyway.”

“I…well…that’s hardly an excuse! As an adult you’re meant to be responsible!”

“Oh, come off it ‘Mione!” Ron huffed, setting his now half empty can down and opening the chips. “Live a little.”

Hermione continued to protest for a while longer before eventually giving up, after which point the group settled into what could have been considered pleasant conversation. Ginny kept silent and tooned it out. Her gaze remaining fixed on Tom. Not missing a single time that he glared at them when he thought that they weren’t looking, the shadow of a nightmare in those horrible red eyes. Or an instance where an ‘innocent’ twitch or shift would place his body between them and Harry, cutting the little raven off completely. Or the way in which he looked at their friend, who was progressively becoming less and less able to keep his feet as his third can exceeded his rather low tolerance for alcohol.

It was sunset by the time she finally convinced the others to leave, both her and Hermione respectively propping up the very drunk boys. Tom and his dog stood glaring down at them from the top of the till like a monster in a fairy tale, his eyes never once leaving her. Burning with primal hatred for a her daring to be so close to a boy which he barely knew yet had so clearly claimed as his.

She didn’t dare provoke the beast by looking back.

The Morning After

Harry James Potter had never felt so terrible before in his life. Sure, he'd drank before. Rarely. At parties. But he'd never drank enough to get a hangover before. Why? Because he knew his limits and was careful not to exceed them. Normally.

He would chalk last night up to not wanting to appear weak or like a light weight in front of Tom. Tom, who had drained an entire can of beer in a single gulp. Who could probably outdrink everyone in Godric's Hollow and still pass every drunk test aside from the breathalyzer. Who would probably laugh himself silly at the sight of him writhing in pain at the sunlight which was currently stabbing him in the eyes.

He groaned and pulled his head out of the ivory bowl of the toilet in his bathroom, his mouth as dry as the Sahara Desert and his head pounding like a drum in a marching band. Not entirely trusting his ability to stand but in a desperate need for food and aspirin Harry pushed himself up onto his feet and stumbled out of his room on unsteady legs.

For some reason, the curtains throughout the house were drawn shut and the resultant dim light was tolerable if only barely. Supporting himself on the banister so that he wouldn't go tumbling down them head first, Harry started down the stairs.

He wandered into the kitchen, pulled down a glass and filled it with water then opened the little bottle of pain pills sitting beside the coffee machine and shook two out into his palm.

"At least eat some toast first. You'll regret it if you don't."

Harry jumped, only narrowly avoiding spilling his entire cup of water down his front, and turned to face his father. James Potter was a near mirror image of his son, though he was about a head and a half taller with hazel eyes, and leaned against the wall beside the door. He was still dressed in his uniform, either having just returned or preparing to leave again, but much to the raven's relief only seemed amused rather than angry over his son's condition.

Small surprise. He, alongside his group of friends which included Remus and his Godfather Sirius, had been called 'the Marauders' when they'd been his age. In fact he might even be a little bit proud that his quiet son was *finally* sticking his nose into a little bit of trouble.

His mother, on the other hand…

"I've already spoken to Lily; she isn't thrilled but she's also the one who drew all the curtains for you. Figured that suffering through your first ever hangover was punishment enough."

Harry had to agree. Punishment enough indeed, and a cruel punishment at that. If this was what happened every time, he'd never drink again. Ever.

As if sensing his line of thought his father chuckled. “Oh, you’ll drink again eventually. Believe me.” He said. “I’m not supposed to say this given my job, but I’m going to prioritize my role as a father in this matter and say that I don’t care as long as you drink safely. Only with people that you trust. Only in private. And only without keys anywhere in reach.”

Talking hurt too much, so Harry mustered up a barely noticeable nod. He winced when loud knocking rang out from the direction of the front door.

“Expecting someone?”

Again Harry shook his head. Ron had to have been in at least as bad a shape as he was, and at this time on a Saturday the girls would be busy; a glance at the clock made it clear that the time was around seven at night. James got up and went to answer the door, the raven cringing slightly at the surprise in his father’s tone as he greeted their visitor. That meant that there was only one person that it could possibly be.

Hearing Tom’s voice only confirmed it. “Hello, Mr. Potter. I’m…your new neighbor. I’m afraid that I might have allowed your son to get a bit carried away at my house last night and figured that I should come over to apologize. And to help him out with the hangover I’m sure that he has.”

Harry rounded the corner at an off-kilter crawl, hissing in pain when the unfiltered light from outside attempted to claw his face off, and squinted against the glare. Tom looked appropriately cowed, though Harry got the distinct impression that this display was merely an act, and shook his father’s hand when he offered it in greeting.

“Tom?”

His eldritch eyes shifted over to him. Scanning his wan, slightly sweaty face and unbalanced stance; a display of obvious distress. His nostrils flared and he reached into the pocket of his jeans, pulling out a small vial of purple liquid. “Hello, Harry. I brought you something that could help.”

“What is that?” His father stepped aside to allow Tom into the house. Harry almost cried in relief when the door shut, blocking out the assaulting light.

“An herbal hangover remedy; a family recipe. We call it Dittany.” Tom tossed up the little vial and caught it again deftly, flashing a winning smile which wouldn’t have appeared out of place in a Zoolander movie. “I come from a bit of an odd line; my distant ancestors on my mother’s side are Celtic Pagans while those on my father’s could outdrink both the Germans and the Irish. I know my hangovers, and how to get rid of them. This,” he handed the vial to Harry, “tastes like shite but works like magic. It’s best to knock it back in one because you’ll gag.”

To get over the pain sooner a bad taste in his mouth was more than worth it. “Bottoms up.” He pulled out the cork with a pop and threw the sharp-smelling contents back.

Tom hadn’t been kidding. Over steeped, spoiled tea. Herbal cough drops. Cigarette ash. Rubbing alcohol. All mixed together. Harry wanted to throw up but managed to keep it down,

falling back against the wall. Throat on fire and constricting as if to choke him.

But after the brunet poured half a bottle of water down his throat he felt absolutely fine. Harry stared at his hands, and then at Tom, in disbelief. “It’s gone. The Hangover. It’s *gone*!” Green eyes peered up at the older man from behind his glasses and, before he could stop himself, Harry spluttered out “are you a wizard?”

Both men laughed, though while his father wasn’t looking Tom winked. “I do have Pagan blood. Amazing what dancing around a bonfire in nothing but an animal pelt can get you.”

“Can it relieve the boredom of being a small town cop?”

Tom tilted his head to the side, as if considering the matter, but then shook his head. “No. I’m afraid that that requires the shaking of gourd rattles for an entire moon cycle followed promptly by the sacrifice of a yearling to the Gods. But I’ll see what I can do for you.”

“Good man.”

Harry huffed and rolled his eyes but couldn’t keep the smile off of his face. Now that the hangover was gone he felt disgusting; his clothing was sticking to his skin from all of the sweat that he was covered in. “I’m going to go take a shower. Whatever ritual the two of you are planning on preforming, maybe don’t do it in the house? I doubt mom would be pleased to come home and find goat blood everywhere.” He hurried up the stairs.

“Are you really a practicing Pagan Tom?” James asked, abruptly sobering. He’d heard horror stories regarding the Occult and, despite his previous requests for more excitement in his job, he wasn’t quite ready to have to deal with ritual murder and demon summoning.

“Occultism and Paganism, if that’s what you’re thinking of, aren’t quite the same thing. Though both do or did include an element of human sacrifice dependent on what part of the world they came from-whether you’re talking about true Pagans, for example, or merely the general application of the word-but as for practicing it no. I don’t. Though, through knowing them, I keep the old ways alive I’m actually largely consider myself something close to an atheist.” He said. “None of my family spanning back hundreds of years have even invoked so much as a small blessing, supposedly owing to not wanting to draw in a ‘monstrous’ ancestor that supposedly existed during the time of the Romans.”

“You don’t sound like you believe that they did.” James sat down at the kitchen table. Tom shrugged and followed his example.

“The tale is rather fantastical. On about the same level as King Arthur. It’s understandable that I don’t.”

It bothered him how similar this man looked to his Harry, though it wasn’t entirely surprising giving that he was his father. Nor was he truly a threat to him. Not in the same way that the little chits that he’d brought over the day before. A parent, after all, didn’t often stand to have romantic aspirations aimed towards their children.

He may not have to kill this man, nor the raven's friends provided he didn't bring them by again most especially the red headed bitch, but given that he was a cop the likelihood of him not eventually getting in the way was low.

If worse can to worst he'd make it painless as possible. It wouldn't do well for the little raven to be sad. He didn't want his legionnaire to suffer anymore. No. No. Not anymore.

He'd court the little raven into comfort and familiarity. Would claim him, fully, as his. And then, once everything was ready, he'd make him like him.

All it would take was a single bite, and then they'd be together forever.

"Have you been around town much, Tom?"

The brunet blinked. "Oh? No. Not yet. I've been down to the market but nowhere else. And I haven't really met anyone either." He said. "Might I ask why?"

"Because I wanted to know if you needed a tour." For a man in uniform he certainly acted rather unprofessional. A lot more like a small overexcited animal than the stern tight laced behavior of the police that he was used to. That suited him just fine. If all of the cops around here were like this it would make hunting so much easier. "Come on. We'll do a ride along."

A ride along? Marvelous. Reluctant but unable to get out of it Tom followed Harry's father out of the house and over to the squad car which he'd passed while making his way up to the front door. The white and black paint glistened in the bright sunlight, the blazing orb still high in the sky despite the time being almost eight.

That was the problem with Alaska. Winters would be perfect for his purposes-almost six months of uninterrupted darkness would mean uninterrupted…fun-but the near twelve hour summer days would quickly prove grating.

Of course, there was an upside. Longer days meant more time for him to spend recementing his claim to his raven.

"Is this your first time in a squad car, Riddle?"

"Is that an indirect way for you to ask if I've even been arrested?" Tom pulled the seatbelt down and clicked it into place. "No. This is my first time. You've no need to be concerned about me bringing trouble to Godric's Hollow. I'm a law abiding citizen."

Wasn't that a joke?

"Good to know. This switch is for the lights and that one over there is for the siren. You can play with them if you like."

Smiling came naturally around Harry, but it was more difficult when he wasn't nearby. But he'd had centuries of practice by now and still managed to form his face into the proper pattern. "With all due respect I'm twenty seven not five."

James shrugged and put the car into reverse. "Never stops my partner."

If you didn't have anything to do but play with what was essentially a mobile lightshow all day Tom could imagine that you would. He'd be rectifying their lack of work very soon.

Busy as he'd been with the process of moving overseas it'd been far too long since he'd last 'gotten back to nature'.

Godric's Hollow truly was tiny. Isolated. Getting help from outside sources in any sort of timely manner would be all but impossible. And there was next to no chance that a Wolf Hunter would find him. Not that there were many if those left in the world.

There were only a handful left on earth who even still believed in his kind, and that sailed him just fine. After all, prey was easier to track and kill when it didn't even think to look for you.

His raven's father chattered to him about buildings and streets and people at random; Tom only half-listened, responding when necessary, and only fully focused again when the man's tone changed from jovial to stern.

"I don't ever want to catch you here, understand Tom?"

The brunet raised an eyebrow, shooting James a half confused half annoyed look. "Might I ask why?"

"Don't need to ask. Just look."

He turned his head and caught sight of the scantily dressed woman who was making her way down the uneven sidewalk.

Prostitutes would provide a steady source of easy prey until he'd established himself enough in the area to start going after targets that would be more easily missed.

"Unless you have male street walkers as well you won't need to worry about finding me out here. Even then you probably wouldn't; I do prefer my partners clean."

"Did you leave someone behind in England?"

Tom rolled his shoulders. "Yes and no. I was on and off with a man named Fenrir Greyback. We've known each other for many years and I suppose you could say that I…turned him." It was a bit of a struggle to keep the smirk off of his face. "But it seems I'll have to find new pastures now, given that going all the way back to England for a one, or couple, night stand is a bit too much effort. And a long term relationship would be a nice change. Rather unfortunately," he pressed his forehead against the cool glass, presenting a purposefully forlorn picture, "my dislike for large crowds lead me to living in small towns like this one where I'm lucky if there's even one other person like me."

"My son feels the same way. Isolated, to a certain point. I think it'll be good for him to know you."

"He's almost a decade younger than me."

“He’s eighteen. An adult.”

He could have purred in pleasure at the turn the conversation had taken. This was as good as parental permission, was in a roundabout way, and would certainly simplify the playing field. “He’s told me that his friends have already tried to set us up. Now you are too?”

“It’s up to Harry. But as a caring rather I’m only trying to keep his options open.”

“His only option.” Not only because Tom was the only real choice the raven had, but because he wouldn’t stand for the continued existence of any sort of competition. He unbuckled his seat belt and reached for the door. “Thank you for the tour. Really. But I’ve a few more things to take care of around town and, since I’m already here, I may as well start in on them.”

“How will you be getting back home? It’s pretty far from our neighborhood to the center of town. Especially on foot.”

“A walk never hurt anyone and the weather’s fair enough that it ought to be enjoyed. I’ll be alright.” He said. “Could you let Harry know that I’ll be painting and renovation the house tomorrow? He’s still more than welcome to swing by, but should expect that he’ll be put to work if he does.”

“I’ll let him know. If you’re sure that you’re alright?”

“Completely.” Tom stepped out. “I’ll speak to you again some other time.”

The brunet watched the cruiser drive away and disappeared from sight before shoving his hands into his pockets and starting down the street. All that was left for him to do now was wait for darkness to fall.

First Blood

“Hey there, handsome; I’d remember a face like yours. You new around here?”

Tom paused halfway down the block at the woman’s call and turned back, gaze roving over the form of the street walker who was wobbling after him on her eight inch heels. Her less than shapely body had been crammed into a too short red dress which was as tight a second skin. She was a mousy little thing, fairly bland and unattractive, with watery slightly jaundiced eyes and frizzy gnarled hair.

Were he a true john, or a lesser predator, he might wonder what sort of things the slab of meat was on. And what sort of things she had. Regardless of the fact that they wouldn’t affect him, the woman was far from what he’d consider ideal prey.

Still, it had been long enough that she’d be passable.

The street walker pulled up short in surprise when she caught sight of his unnatural eyes, but was encouraged closer in short order by the warm smile Tom pulled onto his face. Mindful to show all the signs of an interest costumer.

“No,” he told her, stepping closer. Looming almost flush against her smaller slighter form. The wolf within him frothing in anticipation for the coming kill. “I only just moved here recently; was pointed to the area by an…acquaintance.” That was close enough to what James Potter was to him. At least in his eyes. An insect to be tolerated up until the point where he could be permanently removed. A flea in his fur abided by only for the emotional wellbeing of his mate. “You are what I’m looking for, I trust? A woman who’s out here offering her…services for a modest price?”

I wouldn’t call it ‘modest’, big guy,” her claw like nail-painted with a chipped coat of cherry red lacquer-drew lightly down the front of his chest. Tracing the planes of his muscles hidden beneath the thin fabric of his shirt. “But maybe you and I can make a deal.”

“No need.” He assured her, allowing the woman to draw him off the street and into a narrow, dead end alleyway. The prey escorting its predator to the perfect location for the kill. “I’m both capable and willing to pay whatever price you’d like luscious. Name it and it’s yours, provided that I depart our meeting…satisfied.”

“Don’t worry, doll. I do everything.” Tom caught her by the hips, spun her around on the spot and pressed her back roughly against the uneven brick wall. Her shoulder blades collided with a dull thud. “Hey! Gentle!”

“You said that you do everything.” Tom growled through sharpening teeth, the familiar ache of the change settling into his jaw. “Maybe I like it rough.”

“And I do rough. But that doesn’t mean I don’t appreciate a bit of a warning first darling.” She groused, the darkness obscuring her vision enough that the subtle first changes of the shift from man to beast went unnoticed. “What can I call you anyway?”

“What can you call me?” Tom reached up with one clawed hand and peeled off his too-tight human face. “Big bad wolf will suffice for the moment.” He forced a smile onto his fang filled jaw as it jutted forward into a new formed muzzle, reveling in the sound of the woman’s terrified scream.

Her running footsteps filled his ears as they sharpened to points and migrated up to the top of his head. His back bowed and broke along with his legs as his joints realigned themselves and his muscles bulged, skin splitting over thick dark fur as a tail unfurled from the base of his spine.

His nostrils flared. His new, enhanced senses taking in the stench of fear and city.

“Going somewhere, little red riding hood?” He covered the length of the alley in two bounds, sinking his teeth deep into the woman’s shoulder, snarling at the taste of fresh blood in his mouth, and dragging her back into the darkness.

When Harry arrived at Hill House the next morning he discovered that Tom had left the door open for him, and was greeted by the sight of Nagini sitting on the porch. Seemingly awaiting his arrival.

The great black dog let out a friendly bark when she caught sight of him, bounding off the wooden porch towards him with her large pink tongue lolling out of her mouth. As terrifying as the little beast had been when he’d first seen her, at the sight of Tom’s pet happily panting and wagging her tail Harry couldn’t help but smile.

“Hey Nagini.” He said, stroking her thick coat of soft fur as she pressed against him like an attention seeking Rottweiler. “Where’s your master?”

The black dog barked at him and took off back towards the house. Nudging the front door open wide enough for her to slip through and vanishing inside. Harry sped his pace and walked in after her, shutting the door in his wake with a quiet click.

Nagini yipped at him again and trotted up the wooden stairs, the soft tapping of her claws on the floor drowned out by the booming final chorus of Creedence Clearwater Revival’s *Bad Moon Rising* blaring on the radio upstairs.

“Tom?” he called as he started up towards the second floor, trusting the thumps and creaks of his progress skyward would be enough to alert the other man to his arrival but wanting to make sure.

“In here, Harry.” Tom’s velvet voice carried to him through the sudden cut off of the radio. “The Dittany worked well for you?”

“Brilliantly.” He rounded the corner of the room from which Tom’s voice had issued. “Even with the God awful taste you could sell it and make yourself a millionaire a few times over. What do you put in that, anyway?”

“Lavender, Horehound, Echinacea and a few other things.” He dismounted the rusty stepladder he’d been standing on and pulled the paint brush he’d been using to paint the repaired wall with white wash from between his teeth and set it down atop to open can. He was dressed in a too big t-shirt, faded ratty and filled with holes, and a skidded pair of paint splattered jeans. His brown hair was sticking up in all directions, darkened by sweat, and there was a swipe of white along the curve of his jaw. Harry couldn’t help but think that the look was absurdly sexy.

“Once upon a time I did consider selling it but the amount of time it takes to make even a personal supply causes that to be a rather impractical option.” He picked up a torn piece of cloth and wiped the sweat from his brow. “More for us, though.”

“True.” Already Harry had begun to feel the effects of the house’s poor ventilation and now understood why Nagini had gone back outside. “Have another paint brush? Dad told me what you said about the renovations and I figured you might want some help.”

“I’d love some help.” Tom handed him a roller, picked up the can of paint and poured a portion of it into a tray. “I’ll keep the step ladder and do the edgework and the higher portions closer to the ceiling. Can you take the rest?”

“Sounds good to me.” He said, dragging the roller through the paint and setting in to his task. He didn’t notice how Tom’s eyes lingered on his form as he climbed slowly back up the wobbly step ladder. He wanted nothing more than to grab the little raven and hold him close. To scent him until his status as *his* was undeniable. To drive his teeth into his neck and mark him, despite the inability of his curse to transfer without the power of the full moon to fuel it and their current lack of any real substantial bond. His wolf, close to the surface after the prior night’s shift and unsatisfactory hunt, urged him to do it. To drag the boy into his room and claim him; force his body to yield, to bend to him. The alpha of alphas. The first of them.

Tom gritted his teeth and went back to painting.

“It wasn’t too bad, I hope?”

Tom jerked slightly, startled out of his reverie by Harry’s voice. “It?”

What were they talking about? “I’m sorry?”

“My father. More accurately, your drive with my father. Alone. It wasn’t too bad, was it?”

“No, Harry. It wasn’t bad at all.” He said. “He didn’t say anything embarrassing if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“No more Paganism jokes either.”

“He really didn’t do anything? Not even a cop moment?”

“Well, he did threaten me about the penalty for being a john.” Tom grinned when Harry let out the single most put upon groan that he’d ever heard. “We talked about you, too. He seems

like he's a good father; certainly better than mine was. Says that you feel isolated out here, having been the only one before me."

His face turned a beautiful red color and he started pushing the roller up and down the wall at a much faster pace. "I don't know what he's talking about!"

"It's normal, Harry. There's no need to be shy."

The little raven was having absolutely none of it and Tom found his reactions incredibly amusing. "What are you planning on using this room for?"

"My sword collection." He couldn't stop himself from barking a laugh when Harry rounded on him in surprise.

"You have a *sword collection?*" He demanded. "Why?"

Tom shrugged, edging the brush along the ceiling with a look of concentration. "Everyone has a hobby, dove."

"D-dove?"

"Is pop-kin preferable?"

"Dove is fine!" Harry glared at him when he caught his smirk.

"I've been collecting swords for a long time. Because I find them to be beautiful. And because I, unlike most in this age of guns and bullets, know how to use them." He said. "I can teach you. If you'd like."

He noticed Harry perk up through the corner of one eye.

"You'd teach me? Really?"

"Yeah, I'd be glad to." Typical people in this day and age no longer used swords but many Wolf Hunters did and his beautiful raven would need to learn to defend himself as soon as possible. He'd seen too many young wolves fall over the years. Too many of his children murdered for doing what was natural. And any activity which would keep them in further contact was something he was willing to do. "We'll finish this room, head outside to eat some lunch and then we'll do a bit of basic fencing out in the yard because God knows it's too damn hot in here to do anything strenuous inside."

Harry was too hot at this point to do much more than nod. Tom sent him another smirk before going back to his work.

It was almost three hours later that they finally finished painting the room. Tom complimented him hardily on his work before they left the walls to dry and headed down the stairs to the slightly cooler lower floor. Tom didn't miss a beat in pulling the ragged t-shirt over his head and tossing it carelessly into one of the few boxes of belongings which he'd managed to empty up to this point.

Harry felt the blood drain from his face at the sight of the scars that riddled his skin. Lash marks. Slashes. Burns. The sort of injuries which he'd have expected to see on a prisoner of war after they'd been tortured for information.

"Oh my God, Tom. What happened to you?"

Harry seemed slightly unsettled by the look the brunet gave him. He knew that he had to tell him something but he wasn't ready for his legionnaire to know the truth. "My father."

It wasn't true, but it served the desired purpose of tempting Harry into dropping the matter. Tom reached out and took his shoulder, squeezing it gently.

"I was a long time ago. You've done no harm by bringing it up, but I'd rather you didn't speak of it again."

The little raven nodded, looking repentant, and mumbled an apology. Tom made them both sandwiches, thrown haphazardly together with the contents of his fridge, and brought them out back with him along with a pair of water bottles. The two went to sit in the open hatchback of his truck.

Tom watched with satisfaction as Harry tucked into his sandwich, eating the food which the brunet had provided him. His wolf growled in satisfaction and the brunet hid a small grin behind his own meal. Given time, they'd be hunting together. Killing together. They'd make a proper pack and claim the surrounding area as their hunting grounds.

A few more months, at most. For now, he'd just have to be patient.

The Beast of Godric's Hollow

Small town cops though they may be this was Alaska, the last true frontier, and everything from hunting accidents to animal attacks were things which the Godric's Hollow Police Department had seen before. Were used to, up to a certain point. Things which they knew how to handle. Over the course of their careers the three Marauders had seen terrible car accidents, people mauled by Kodiak bears, freezing deaths, flipped snow mobiles and even a very drunk hunter who had somehow managed to wind up with a hunting arrow in his ass but none of them had ever seen anything like this.

It looked like something out of Hollywood monster movie. The body left behind barely recognizable as human any longer, the meat stripped clean and entire portions of the skeleton were missing. Presumably having been devoured.

From the uneven floor to the top of the walls on both sides, the length of the alley was drenched in blood. There were claw marks in the ground at the mouth of the alley, clearly made by human hands; the broken bits of nail and scrapped off skin a clear testament to the woman's desperation to escape from her attacker.

The smell was unholy.

"Whatever did this," Remus grimly sidestepped a puddle of red which had begun to congeal in a divot in the ground, "it wasn't human."

"We know." James had never considered himself a man with a weak stomach but he now found himself struggling not to add to the mess. Sirius didn't look too much better, his face tinged an unflattering shade of green. "Nothing human could possibly cause carnage on this level in the small window of time the attack must have taken place to go unnoticed. And there are no animals in the area that could do this either. Wolves. Moose. Caribou. Bears, even. *Nothing* has ever been this bad."

Whatever it had been it was massive, hungry and had a taste for human flesh. Not a good combination at all. The type of beast which, in an ideal world, would be immediately hunted down and ended. Permanently. But how did you go about hunting something down when you didn't even know what it was. And how did you kill something that was capable of this?

"How the hell did something this big get into the middle of town without being seen? Even in the middle of the night it shouldn't have been possible." Sirius said, using his hat as a fan in an effort to keep both the stench and the flies at bay. "Someone must have seen it; have we asked around yet."

"There are people taking care of that, Sirius." Lupin said, bending down over the meager remains and pulling something free of where it had lodged in the bone. "We're supposed to be assisting with the investigation of the scene. Look at this."

“Found something, Moony?”

“I think it’s a tooth.”

The other two men reluctantly shuffled closer to the corpse in order to get a better look at what Remus was holding; a blood-smeared fang which stretched the length of his palm.

“Jesus!”

“It looks like a wolf tooth. Remember the one that broke off in the arm of that hunter last October?”

Remus nodded, ignoring the fact that Sirius had snatched the tooth and was now holding it up to his face. “That’s what I thought as well, Prongs. If not a wolf than a feral dog or some other sort of canine.”

“From where? Jurassic Park? This thing looks like something you’d find stuck in the jaw of a Tyrannosaurus Rex!”

“Alaska is huge and a great deal of it is unexplored or only lightly explored wilderness. Mountains. Forest. Tundra. Do you think it could be an undiscovered species? Or maybe a holdover from the last ice age? Is that possible?”

“I think we should have it tested for DNA before we jump to any conclusions. Do you have an evidence bag on you?”

James shook his head. “No. We brought some with us, of course, but left them in the car.”

“I’ll go and get it. You two stay here.” Sirius bounded off, not able to get out of the alley quite fast enough.

“He’s certainly eager to get away from the smell for a while.”

“Can you blame him, Moony?” James asked. “I’m probably going to have to use the hose and bathe on the front lawn because there’s no way that Lily is letting me back in the house smelling like this. And the uniform…forget about it; it’ll have to be burned.”

The other man chuckled. “Even if she wouldn’t force you to burn the uniform would you want to keep it? It’d take a couple hundred deep washes to even stand a chance at getting this ungodly smell out.”

“Well, I guess that’s true.” He said. “It’s probably better to just destroy it. Joint uniform burning on our next day out?”

“Make it a night of drinking around a bonfire, for old time’s sake, and I’m in for sure!” Sirius returned with the tooth in the bag and handed it to Remus. “With all this blood the beast must have been covered in it; maybe we can see where it went. What do the two of you say to trying to find some bloody paw prints?”

Tom watched in amusement from where he sat on the couch, his long legs crossed and Nagini's head in his lap, as Harry lay sprawled on the floor on his back covered in sweat and paint at the end of almost six hours of fencing. He was unrefined-as to be expected given that today was the first day he'd even held a sword-and a bit clumsy but was incredibly determined and refused to quite until he either deemed his skills satisfactory for the time being or his knees gave out, causing him to collapse. The cavalry sword that Tom had given him to use-a light one handed weapon with a two foot slightly curved blade-lay balanced across his stomach and he'd tossed his shirt over his face in an effort to scrub away the sweat which he'd given up on halfway through.

"I do have furniture, Harry. Why are you lying on the floor?"

The raven reached up to pull his shirt away, taking his glasses with it, and looked over at him with slightly red rimmed eyes. "Too far away. Too much effort. Floor was right here."

"We could have stopped at any time but you wanted to keep going."

"No regrets!"

"There will be tomorrow." Tom assured him, scratching behind one of Nagini's ears. "If you're even able to move by that point I'll be deeply shocked."

"Would Dittany work for that?"

Tom shook his head. "No. Sorry, dove, but you and Advil are on your own with this one."

"If I can't move tomorrow will you come and visit me?"

"Yes, Harry. If you really can't move come tomorrow Nagini and I will come and visit you."

The raven let out a happy humming sound, finding getting words out between his panting to be too difficult, and startled when a knock came on the door.

"Shit! What time is it?"

"About six." Tom got up, Nagini leaping down from the couch with a soft growl. "I'm not expecting anyone. So I'd assume that that's one of your parents."

Another put upon groan as, with a considerable struggle, Harry managed to push himself up from the floor. Holding the sword in one hand as he propped himself up with the other. "What should I do with the sword?"

"What should you do with it?" Tom picked up the wooden scabbard and tossed it at him; the throw was gentle and underhand but it still nearly slammed into Harry's chest. "Keep it."

"What-?"

"You're not done learning to use it, Harry, and that's far from the most valuable sword in my collection. It won't be missed, and this way you can practice with it on your own time as well. Just bring it by whenever you want another lesson."

“O-ok.” Gifts seem to throw him a little off balance. Once soundly back on his feet Harry began the clumsy process of sliding the blade back into its scabbard. “Thanks. It’s not every day that you’re given a sword.”

“No, I’d say it isn’t.” He said, resting his hand on Harry’s back to guide him towards the front door. “You’re more than welcome, Harry.”

James Potter was standing on the other side of the door, balanced gingerly atop the sagging porch with his black hair damp as if he’d recently emerged from a shower. Despite the fact that he couldn’t have gotten back from his job more than twenty minutes prior his uniform was nowhere to be seen, yet beneath soap and laundry detergent Tom could still detect the scent of blood and rancid meat.

So he’d visited his scraps, then? Cleaned up after him, had he? It was difficult for him to keep a smirk off of his face, all the more so when the man’s grim expression morphed into one of surprise at the sight of the weapon in his son’s hands.

“Hey, dad.” Harry chirped, still oblivious to the dark aura which had fallen over the porch like a heavy pall. “Tom taught me to use a sword after we finished painting one of the rooms. And he gave me this one to hold onto. I can keep it, right?”

James looked at him like he’d given the little raven a pickled snake; a mixture of confusion that he’d even have it in the first place, concern for the potential damage Harry could do to himself or others with it, and annoyance that his new neighbor had armed his child with a deadly weapon. At the sight of it Tom could no longer contain his grin.

“A sword, Riddle? Really?”

“He’s eighteen, I’ve taught him proper safety and it’s in a scabbard. What could go wrong?”

Clearly James could think of a lot of things which could go wrong. Which led Tom to wonder just how clumsy Harry was on a bad day. Or any day, really, for that matter. But all that he said was “I’m sending Lily to you.”

He was a just shy of two thousand year old Lycanthrope. A human woman, no matter how angry and high on agitated maternal instincts, wasn’t something that he considered the least bit frightening.

“I haven’t met her yet, but I’m sure your wife is reasonable.” He said. “Harry has been a great help to me today. Thank you for sending him over to help me with knocking out a bit more of the renovations.”

“Of course.”

“I was happy to help, Tom. And I’ll be back to help more as soon as I’m not sore anymore.”

The brunet smiled and squeezed his shoulder gently. “Just worry about resting, dove. I’ll be able to handle everything on my own while you’re lain up with sore muscles.”

“Are you sure?”

“Completely.”

“If you say so. Just make sure the house doesn’t collapse on you.”

“No promises, doll.” He winked, smirking when Harry turned red once again. “Have a good night.”

“You too, Tom.”

“Riddle.” He paused halfway back through the door and glanced back at the other man. “Be careful in the area for a while.”

Tom raised an eyebrow. “Might I ask why?”

“There’s been an attack in the city. Some sort of animal, but we have no idea what. It’s killed someone; just keep an eye out, and keep your dog inside.”

He nodded. “Thank you for the warning, James. I’ll be sure to dig my hunting rifle out of my belongings today; God knows that, in this state, the walls of this house won’t be keep anything out that wants to come in.”

Worried emerald eyes immediately swiveled onto him. “Tom-.”

“Don’t worry, Harry. I’ll be alright.”

The raven didn’t look convinced but allowed his father to lead him away back towards his house.

“He really taught you have to use a sword?” James sounded more resigned than anything.

“Basic safety and a few simple fencing moves. It was a lot of fun but I definitely went a little bit overboard; I might not be able to go to school tomorrow.”

“You can take that matter up with your mother.”

“He’s amazing; it’s almost like he’s stepped out of a time when swords were normal. And the amount of endurance he has is ridiculous. I swear, Tom’s not even human! It was so hot in there that he took his shirt off and, dear God, the only people that are *that* ripped are firemen and military personel!” Some disconnected part of him was aware that he was rambling but Harry was too busy internally drooling over the intimate view he’d received of both Tom’s chest and back to care.

Though it was obvious his father didn’t understand his attraction to Tom he did remember what it had been like to be his age and watched him prattle on in amusement. “I take it that you like him, then?”

“I-I-.” He felt his face heat up again and, abruptly sobering, looked away. “I do, but…he’s older.”

“Nine years older, to be exact. But you’re an adult, Harry. And age differences alone aren’t dangerous.” He said. “Though I’ll admit, I’d be less than thrilled with your choice in… potential boyfriends if you *had* more choices, especially given that he’s closer to my age than yours. But even then…as long as you’re happy your mother and I will always be able to find some way to come to terms with it. And as an adult it’s up to you to make your own life choices.”

Harry smiled, shifting the sword in his grip. “Thanks, dad.”

“He’s a good man?”

The raven looked at him in confusion. “What do you mean? You’ve met him; don’t you have your own opinion of Tom?”

“It’s easy to put up a façade for a few hours, Harry. You’ve spent more time with him than I have.”

Was Tom a good man? He certainly thought so, at least for the most part, but had he known him for long enough to really tell? Was he too blinded by how attractive Tom was to accurately evaluate the question? “He’s a little…” dominating sounded a bit too concerning, “possessive and that’s a little bit worrying. But he’s sweet, in his own way. He’s great with Nagini and people always talk about how people who are good with animals can’t be all bad.”

“They do say that, don’t they?”

The house was now in sight, his father’s black and white cruiser sitting out in the drive as usual.

“You said that there was an animal attack? In town? That it happened last night?” He asked, looking up in concern. “Was it anyone we know?”

“No, Harry, it wasn’t anyone that you would know. And that’s all I’m going to say about the matter.” He said. “You’re not a child anymore but you are a civilian and all you need to know is that something dangerous is out there. That you need to be careful, especially outside, and that you’re not to go outside alone and unarmed at night at all.”

Harry nodded and dipped his head. “Yes, Sir.”

“Dinner should be ready soon; go and hide that in your room before your mother sees it.”

Harry nodded and hurried up the stairs, sliding the sword safely under his bed and out of sight. By the time he made it back downstairs dinner had already been put on the table. Conversations continued as was typical at the table; how was your day, what was work like, what did you do, how was Tom? By the time dinner was over his parents had teasingly ganged up on him, Harry had once again turned bright red and not a single word of what his father had seen that day was spoken.

Until he eavesdropped from the stairs.

By the time he received a notification on his phone about a skype call Harry was possessed of a wealth of horrifying details. And Ron and Ginny no doubt had more courtesy of Bill, their older brother who worked in the county morgue. The call was a four way between him, Ron, Ginny and Hermione. He clicked the 'answer' button and the video call bloomed across his screen, greeting him with the pale faces of his friends.

"You heard about what happened, didn't you?"

"Yeah," he said, "my dad worked the scene with Remus and Sirius. They found a tooth lodged in one of the bones and followed a trail of bloody paw prints a couple of yards before the thing leapt a wall and disappeared. They don't know what it was, but it was massive."

"And has an iron stomach, according to Bill; almost forty percent of the skeleton was eaten, Harry. *Eaten*."

"He says that there were marks on some of the remaining bones which showed that whatever it was cut the meet off and took it with it." Ginny said. "Funny how this all happened almost immediately after Riddle moved to town."

"Ginny!" All three of them spoke in startled unison.

"People can't eat bone. Not only are human teeth not strong enough, human stomach acid couldn't break it down. And if he was a cannibal there would be signs."

"Signs, Hermione?"

"Yes, signs. Signs that we would have noticed in even that one day we spent at his house; the consumption of human flesh over an extended period of time, such as is done in certain tribes as a part of funerary practice, causes Kuru. A neurodegenerative disease characterized by uncontrollable shaking."

"Not to mention that Harry said they followed paw prints, Ginny. And that Bill was very clear about how the teeth marks left in some of the bones were canine." Ron said.

"He also said that preliminary tests showed the marrow of the tooth had markers from both human and canine DNA!"

"We'd have noticed, Gin, if he had teeth the size of carving knives."

"Not to mention that those kind of tests aren't the most accurate due to how quick they are." Hermione said. "You're not really attempting to claim that Harry's new neighbor is a werewolf, are you? That's really just illogical."

"He's strange and all of this started after he showed up. You can't say it's not suspicious."

Annoyed, the raven took steps to redirect the conversation. "So, what's happened to the tooth Ron?"

"They've sent it along to an expert out of state, hoping to get some sort of answers about just what it is we're dealing with." He said. "Should be back in a couple of weeks. Whether or not

they'll get any real answers out of it I can't tell. I'm surprised that your dad told you what he did; we had to twist Bill's toes to get anything out of him."

"He didn't; I eavesdropped." The two boys exchanged a grin and Hermione rolled her eyes. Ginny remained silent, still unwilling to let the matter drop.

"So, Harry," the brunet said after another minutes of pointless conversation, "how was your day with Tom?"

By the Fire Side

“We’re worried for you, dear sister.”

“Ever since Harry’s new neighbor moved in almost two weeks ago he’s been too busy helping him repair his house to come around much.”

“We know that you know he swings for the other team but if we didn’t know any better we’d swear that you were jealous.”

Ginny looked up at her twin brothers in a mix of amusement and dark annoyance. “But you do know that I know that Harry could out-gay a pink unicorn so I assume you also know it must be something else.”

“We do.” Fred said.

“Be what that is we couldn’t guess.” George said.

“We’ve tried.”

“And failed.”

“Perhaps you care to share?”

“There’s something weird about Riddle and I’m concerned for Harry. There have been three murderous attacks since he showed up and I think he might be responsible.” She told them. “I’m trying to figure out a way to prove that the bastard is dangerous.”

The twins exchanged a semi-confused semi-concerned glance between each other before looking at their sister again.

“Well, George and I haven’t met the man quite yet.”

“But as Ron tells it he’s a fairly normal English man.”

“Not that we know all that much about what normal English men are like given that we live out here in old Alaska.”

“You really think that Godric’s Hollow’s newest resident is the big bad wolf.”

“I think that ‘werewolf’ is as good an explanation as any other at this point and I want to put cameras around his house. I want to catch him in the act. If he is a monster, or at least a murderer, then the footage will prove it. And if I’m wrong I can stop harping on the matter before they all think I’ve lost my mind.”

“Our little sister is planning to moonlight as a spy, is she?”

“Looks like she is, Fred.”

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking George?”

“If you’re thinking that we should help her, if only to make sure that she doesn’t get herself hurt, than I’d say that yes. We are indeed.” He said. “Of course, we’ll have to find the cameras for the matter and the time to be able to put them up without being seen.”

“That’s true. Even if he isn’t really the son of the Wolf Man we don’t want to have him calling the police on us. That’s be an interesting thing to have to explain to Harry’s father.”

“Harry said that Tom is an avid hunter, and the summer season has just recently opened up.” Ginny told them. “He’s bond to leave on a hunting trip eventually. We’ll set up the cameras then.”

“Three attacks in almost two weeks and there’s still not even the slightest hint as to *what* is behind this. We’ve yet to get a workable cast of the prints that the animal has left behind and the fang that Moony found was cross contaminated with human DNA. Probably from someone in the labs given that it turned out to be male in origin despite the fact that the victim was female. The thing has attacked all across town, the public is terrified and we’re still no closer to putting it down! If this goes on much long I think I’m going to lose my mind!”

The door of his cruiser swung shut with a bang.

“At this rate the entire town of Godric’s Hollow is going to run out of replacement uniforms and we’re going to have to start going to scenes naked to avoid having to start burning our own clothing! Never mind the constant fear that this damn thing could come crashing through the windows of my house at any moment! At least Harry has a sword now!”

“Harry has a sword?” Remus repeated as Sirius looked at his friend in alarm.

“Where does an eighteen year old get a sword? Especially in this day and age! A gun I might be able to understand but…didn’t massive blades go out of style in the 1800s?”

“They didn’t go out of style to Tom Marvolo Riddle, who incidentally is also who he got the sword from. And who’s teaching him to use it.”

“Tom Marvolo Riddle?” Remus repeated. “That’s your new neighbor, isn’t it?”

“And my son’s boyfriend…or pseudo boyfriend? They’ll…get there…eventually.” He said. “He’s over at his house now, as has pretty much become the norm.”

“So Harry has finally found himself a man, has he?” Sirius snickered. “That’s encouraging to hear. I thought that the Diggory fiasco might have put him off attempting to date anyone for a while.”

“How old is he?” Remus asked. “If he has his own home, especially one like Hill House which is where I assume he lives as that’s the only home I’m aware was empty, I’d assume that he’s an adult.”

“Yes, he’s an adult. Almost thirty.”

“*What?”* Remus made an effort to quiet Sirius down which went largely ignored. “You’re letting your son potentially date a man who’s much closer to our age than his who you know nothing about and could quite possibly be some sort of axe murdering psychopath who collects swords and *gave him one*! What kind of irresponsible-why are you looking at me like that, Moony? I would never give Harry and medieval war machine and tell him to go play in traffic!”

“He’s eighteen, Padfoot, not five.”

“Did you even know anything about this man?”

James pushed his glasses more securely into place on the bridge of his nose. “He’s a Celtic Pagan on his mother’s side.”

“*Are you kidding me?”*

“And apparently a Wizard, at least according to Harry. All because of a supposedly ‘magical’ hangover cure.” He ran a hand through his uneven hair. “The only reason he even needed it was because Riddle let him get stone cold drunk when he dropped in with his friends.”

“Aren’t we cops?”

“Forgotten the time you offered Harry straight vodka when he was twelve, have you?”

“I remember that; it was thanksgiving and Lily almost turned you into a pelt rug.”

“I did offer Harry alcohol, yes, but the difference Moony is that I’m family! There wasn’t any chance that I’d drag him up to the bedroom once he was too drunk to be able to say no!”

“Tom is a strange man, that much is undeniable, but he’s not a rapist or a murderer. Just an eccentric small town only child from somewhere dead center of England. And even if the age difference is less than ideal it is what it is and I’d rather Harry be with him, learning how to paint and renovate, than be with some of the boys his own age partying and doing drugs.”

Sirius was forced to make a reluctant admission that that was true. After that, the three men fell silent until they reached the top of the hill.

Hill House still looked as if it had seen better days but had also made a drastic improvement from what it had looked like before Tom had moved in. Though the front had yet to receive a

fresh coat of paint the windows had all been repaired from the inside and the entire porch had been rebuilt from the ground up. Tom's truck sat quiet in the driveway.

It was the massive amount of blood which led the three to draw their weapons. Copious amounts of scarlet filled the open hatchback, smeared the sides and was splattered across the ground. The front bumper of the pickup was dented badly and a slick of crimson led all the way up the rest of the drive towards a recently erected shed.

"Do you think it's another attack?" Sirius' eyes were wide with fright. "Should we call it in?"

"To hell with calling it in! I need to know if my son's ok; Harry was with Riddle and if that *thing* did this…"

James didn't need to finish that sentence, both of his friends fully understood and when he moved forward they followed. Something growled low and vicious, from inside. They threw open the door only to be met with an explosion of crazed barking and a powerful wave of copper.

Harry was holding Nagini back by the collar, looking half apologetic and half embarrassed for Tom's state. Riddle, for his part, was covered head to toe in blood holding a combat knife in one hand and a severed heart in the other. A deer hung strung up by its back legs from the ceiling behind him. He blinked at them rather owlishly before ordering his dog to silence.

"Not a maniac, is that what you said Prongs?" the raven looked at James as all three somewhat reluctantly lowered their guns,

"Riddle, what are you…you look like you've been rolling around in a slaughter house!"

"He hit it. The deer, I mean. It jumped out in front of the truck when we were coming back from getting marshmallows and firewood at the store." Harry quickly explained, releasing Nagini. "We didn't want to waste it so…"

"Most of the meat is ruined-the blunt force trauma perforated the bowel-but some of it could still be salvaged and deer season started yesterday so I didn't see the harm in it." Tom set the heart atop the small pile of what was, presumably, salvaged venison and pulled over a bucket of water to wash up. "Didn't mean to frighten anyone; I know that the car's a little bloody. I'll have to take the hose to it."

"We're going to have a fire and make s'mores, which is why we went to get marshmallows. I don't have to go back yet do I?" he asked. "It won't get dark out for another few hours and Tom has guns. And there's Nagini to protect us. Even a man eating bear wouldn't come near a dog like her, right?"

Tom chuckled at the pleading note in his voice, drying his hands on a somewhat bloody cloth. "The three of you are more than welcome to join us as well. We've plenty of s'mores material to go around, courtesy of a certain someone."

He sent a mild and affectionate glare at Harry who defended himself by saying "I like marshmallows and chocolate, Tom. Bite me!"

The brunet's response was a rather odd one; he sent him a strange look, something ferocious flashing in his red eyes, and set the cloth aside. "I could tell; I had to stop you from buying an entire box of Hershey's." He grinned when Harry blushed, revealing canines which were almost abnormally sharp. "So what say you, officers? Are you joining us? I would like to hear more about this 'animal' that's been attacking people; if there's a hunt to be had I offer my services."

"Well…if you're welcoming us to stay I'll take you up on the offer. At least for a little while." James eyes Nagini who glared back with far too much sentience for a dog. "If you really don't mind having us."

"I'll stick around too. Should get to know the *man* who's dating my Godson."

"Sirius!" Remus looked scandalized but Tom only laughed, slinging an arm around the still blushing raven's shoulders. He took the opportunity to hide his burning face in Tom's chest.

"On, no, it's quite understandable. We're not quite 'together' yet but I'm certainly aware that my relationship with Harry is…unorthodox. It's natural to be a little bit concerned especially considering that you don't know me and have never met me before today." He stuck out a hand towards Sirius in a gesture which was clearly meant to be placating. "Tom Marvolo Riddle. Pleasure. Please excuse the blood under my nails."

"Sirius Black. Hurt Harry and you're going through Lily, James and me."

"Dually noted." He released his hand and turned to Remus. "You are?"

"Remus Lupin. Family friend."

"Charmed. Will you be joining us as well?"

The amber eyed man glanced at his two friends, glad to have his hand released from the grip of the other man. There was something unplaceable about Tom Riddle which just seemed… wrong to him. He radiated an almost overbearing dominance which was feral and alarming.

None of the others seemed to notice and, even worse, Harry seemed drawn in by it like a moth to a flame.

"Come on, Moony. The Brit could end up as Harry's husband one day and we should really make sure we 'get to know him'."

"They act like I'm a woman and that you're threatening my virtue."

"Why, there's no need for them to be concerned for that. I do require consent for such things." Harry's effort to roll his eyes ended in a startled yelp when he was quite suddenly lifted in strong arms. "Onward?"

"At least warn me before I'm princess lifted, Tom!"

"Why? You don't weigh all that much, doll, and it's not like I'm going to drop you." Harry pouted at him as the brunet carted him passed them out of the door of the little shed.

“Well, it’s good to know that he’s affectionate.” Remus said.

“It’s not ideal but Harry adores him; all we hear about at dinner these days is the latest news on Tom Riddle.” James said as they exited the shed, the dog trotting behind them. “Lily is glad that he’s found someone, though she hasn’t met him yet.”

The brunet darted passed them again, Harry still in his arms and his filled with wood.

“He acts younger than he is.”

“So do you, Padfoot.”

“Maybe he’s not so bad after all. *Maybe.”*

Remus and James exchanged a semi-exasperated glance before following Sirius over to the now wood filled fire pit. Tom still hadn’t put Harry down, the raven now holding a bottle of accelerant.

“Careful, don’t put too much on. We want a bonfire but getting flambéed in the meanwhile probably isn’t the more desirable outcome.”

Harry almost dropped the bottle and glared at Tom who smiled angelically back at him. “Can we *not* talk about explosions while I’m holding half a gallon of gasoline?”

“You’re holding the gas, yes, but I’m holding you. If you go up in flames, doll, so do I.”

“Well then, put me down so I can light it and only one of us is at risk of being caught on fire.”

“Darling,” the brunet said as he lowered the raven back onto the ground, “you’re *already* on fire.”

“Please stop.”

Tom snorted and trotted off towards the kitchen to retrieve the s’mores supplies, his place beside Harry immediately being filled by Nagini. The dog growled at Sirius when he approached the raven but didn’t snap at him.

“That’s how he’s normally like is he?”

Harry shrugged. “Yes and no. Tom’s acting a bit more excitable than usual but this is pretty much how he normally is. At least when I’m involved.”

Nagini pressed into the side of his leg, prompting Harry to drop his hand into her fur. Tom re-emerged from the house with his arms full of graham crackers chocolate and marshmallows. “Skewers please, Nagini dear.”

The dog let out a short bark and took off towards the house, nudging open the back door, and returned soon after with a package of metal skewers in his mouth.

“Good girl.”

“How did you train your dog to do that?” Remus asked as Tom handed Harry a long nosed lighter.

“Nagini wasn’t trained to do it, it’s simply something that she does.” He said. “She’s incredibly intelligent and a longtime companion of mine. I discovered her in the forest after she’d been abandoned by her mother and raised her from a pup. An incredibly loyal and protective thing, aren’t you?”

Nagini wagged her tail as her master wrapped his arms around her neck, burying his face in her fur. Harry smiled at him as he lit the fire.

“You found her in the forest?” James repeated as the brunet fed the dog a marshmallow. “You’re certain she’s a German Shepherd?”

“Half.” Tom said. “She’s a wolf-hybrid. The only odd thing about that being that wild wolves in Great Britain were wiped out in the 19th century. A pity too; such beautiful creatures.”

He idly passed the raven a skewer, watching Harry slide six marshmallows onto it at once.

“I’m happy to be here in Alaska; one of the last places in the world with wild wolves. Where they aren’t trapped on reserves and murdered by farmers simply for existing. It’s good to hear them sing again.”

“Again?” Harry asked, removing the skewer from the fire once he’d deemed the marshmallow sufficiently blackened. “I thought you said that wolves were gone in England.”

“I worked at a sanctuary for a few years after high school, doll. They’d howl at night and it was a truly beautiful sound.”

“You’re not some sort of eco-terrorist are you?” Sirius asked, eyeing the other man. “Seems odd that you’d be a hunter if you were one but the way you went on about ‘murdering’ wolves…”

“Humans are responsible for an unnecessary amount of extinction, all because we fear the animals or what they could do to us. Because we’re no longer as in touch with nature as the generations before us. My ancestors worshiped wolves, and now none are left in the land where they lived.” Tom ran his fingers through his hair, upsetting his usually immaculate curls. “Predators shouldn’t be destroyed for the crime of doing what is natural. Self-defense against one beast in particular is one thing, wiping out an entire species is wholly another.”

“I suppose that I can see your point.”

“Glad to hear that. I’m going to go grab the booze: beer or hard liquor?”

Harry made an indistinguishable sound through the mass of chocolate sound through the mass of chocolate and marshmallow shoved into his mouth and the three other men didn’t seem to have much of a preference either way. Tom returned with a twelve pack of generic

beer cans, pulling one off and handing it to the raven whom had already begun to roast more marshmallows.

“Wash that down before you choke, darling. We aren’t playing Chubby Bunny.”

“I’m surprised you’ve even heard of Chubby Bunny, old man.” Harry said once he’d regained the proper use of his jaw. Tom flicked him on the forehead in response.

“So,” James said as the drinks were passed around, “how have the renovations been going, Riddle?”

“Smashingly. If things continue at this rate I should be able to repair all the holes and drafts before winter hits. Should be completely done by the close of next summer; understandably, due to all of the conditions, I won’t be working on the exterior over the colder months.” He said. “The plumbing is done. The ventilation is done. The electricity is done. The stairs are fixed. The porch is fixed. Both bedrooms are in working order. As much as a hassle having a house this rundown can be at times I definitely appreciate the early access to a hardcore workout it provides. And it’s a fairly good bonding experience as well.”

“I learned more about cleaning and dressing a carcass than anything to do with house repairs today.” The brunet made a sound of alarm when a gooey square was shoved into his hands. “I’m not eating all of these, Tom.”

“…Thank you, Harry.” He didn’t seem too pleased by the sticky surprise which had been suddenly foisted on him but managed to muster up the will to eat it anyway. “About this vicious animal?”

“We can’t tell you any more than I already have, Tom. We still have no idea what it is or where it came from; if we do manage to father enough on the beast to muster a hunting party you’ll be the first to know.”

“Nagini and I will be more than pleased to help you…run it down.” He said as Harry, starting in on his fourth s’more and second can, nestled shyly against Tom’s side. The brunet ran long fingers through the little raven’s hair.

They stayed out there until well near nightfall, the four adults continuing to bounce from topic to topic as it struck them-and Tom more than once having to deflect bladed questions aimed at him by Sirius-until the fire burned low and Harry had passed out half in Tom’s lap and half on the grass.

“I suppose we should all be heading in before the sun goes down completely with the mystery beast roaming around we wouldn’t want to get caught out here.” He gently repositioned Harry to prevent his leg from falling asleep. “I can put him in the guest bedroom, if you’d like to save you to effort of carrying him home or waking him up.”

James seemed to hesitate for a moment, as if evaluating his intentions, before seeming to realize both that Harry was an adult and that Tom had plenty of opportunities to take advantage of him if he’d planned to do so and nodded. “Thank you, Riddle.”

“Of course.” Tom said with a smile, gently lifting the sleeping raven into his arms and standing up. “I’ll send him home in the morning after he’s woken up. Have a safe walk back.”

After the other men had disappeared back around the corner of the house the brunet whistled to Nagini and went back inside. Harry curled closer as he climbed the stairs, turned the corner and, after briefly considering taking him into the Master instead, took him into the guest bedroom and lay him on the bed.

Nagini made a quiet grumble from behind him and Tom’s smile became genuine as he gently ran his fingers along the curve of Harry’s cheek.

“He’s not mine quite yet, my dear, but soon.” He said softly. Watching the smaller male burrow deeper into the bed. “A few more moons; I’ll have gained back his love and trust by then. Then I can renew our bonds and make him like me. He’ll join our little pack by summer’s end, and then we’ll put a permanent stop to all thought of the prey hunting us down.”

The Invitation

Harry could feel the pounding headache even while half asleep and didn't want to even attempt to open his eyes, knowing the pain that he'd be in the moment that he did so. Where was he? The last thing which he consciously remembered was passing out against Tom from a combination of alcohol and exhaustion. The bed in which he was currently lying was not his own he could tell from the texture of the sheets and the softness of the mattress beneath him-and smelled of the wood smoke and night air still on his clothes as well as fresh paint and Tom's detergent.

Was he still in Tom's house? Was he in the master bedroom? If so, where had Tom slept? It hadn't been with him because the other side of the bed was cold.

Before Harry could consider things further he heard the door creak open and Tom's boots clunk across the floor. His long warm fingers ran through his hair and gently messaged his temples.

"Good morning, my love. I've brought you another dose of Dittany and have made breakfast if you'd like some."

"Yes, that sounds good. And thank you for the Dittany, it's just…"

"You don't want to open your eyes?" Harry could hear the smile in his voice and shook his head. The cork in the vial which Tom was holding popped as it was pulled free. A cold glass rim pressed against his lips and the little raven took the dose which he was given, the taste and burn making him shudder.

Tom passed him his glasses when he saw his green eyes opened. His vision focused into an image of the older brunet, in all his glory, his hair wet from a shower and his shirt sticking to his chest. He was wearing an apron over it with a skull and serpent emblazoned on the front.

Harry dearly regretted having missed him at the stove.

"Come on," he said, reaching down and helping him out of the bed, "the food is on the table. Milk, tea, apple or orange juice?"

"Milk please." The raven said, following the older man down the stairs.

A trio of massive breakfast plates had been assembled in the kitchen, just as Tom had promised; two on the table and one on the floor, being made short work of by Nagini. The gleaming white ceramic was blanketed entirely by what Harry could only assume was a typical English breakfast. Bacon, scrambled eggs, sausage and toast were all normal and recognizable to Harry by sight. The rest of it however was an assortment of foods which, no doubt, were native to Tom's home country.

"White and Black Pudding, Bubble and Squeak, and a type of Haggis called Gurty Pudding. It's usually made with lamb but I used my own recipe this time. Same as with the sausage.

Got all of the ingredients fresh this morning." Tom supplied, doubtlessly having noticed his confusion.

"Is it the venison that we managed to save last night?"

The brunet smiled at him but didn't answer, tucking into his meal. Harry picked up his knife and fork and went to work as well.

"It's good." Harry told him, sticking to familiar territory until he had no other choice. The eggs and bacon were normal. The sausage tasted weird. Not bad, but weird. Not venison, then, though what meat Tom might have used he hadn't the slightest clue.

Once he finished the food that he was used to, he turned his attentions to the three different 'puddings'. The 'black pudding' look more like a sponge cake made out of clotted blood, the 'white pudding' looked concerningly similar to a meat version of your crazy grandma's fruitcake and the 'Gurty Pudding'-Haggis, Tom had called it-looked like ground beef mixed with onions. "So, uh…what are these?"

"Blood sausage, meat and oatmeal cakes and pluck-heart, liver and lungs-respectively." Tom snorted when Harry turned white and picked up his tea. "Believe me, they task better than they look and sound."

Half a slice of the Black Pudding-the 'Blood Sausage'-disappeared into Tom's mouth.

"Just taste it. If you don't like it you can give it to Nagini."

The black dog licked her chops and rested her head in his lap. The White and Gurty Pudding were alright but Harry couldn't bring himself to even attempt to try the Black Pudding and feed all of it and a good portion of the other two to Nagini who licked his hand afterwards in thanks. Tom, meanwhile, had gotten a second helping for himself and seemed almost morbidly amused by the raven's disgust with the ingredients.

"As we discussed last night regarding the legality of my taking that deer, the summer hunting season has begun and I, as an avid hunter for both sport and food, will be going out in search of moose in another few days. To a remote spot I've heard good things about. I'd like it if you accompanied me, should you wish to." He said. "It would be, I think, a pleasant date; a weekend alone for just the three of us. Under the stars. Out in the last true wilderness. Camping. It'll be fun."

"I'd love to come, Tom, really I would but…you really want to go camping in the middle of the woods with that *thing* on the loose?"

"I doubt that we'd still be in its reach my dear."

"How can you possibly be so calm about this, Tom? We'd be miles from civilization and if that thing attacked we'd be screwed; from what I've heard about the scenes the beast responsible could probably *throw* your truck!"

Not quite. A smaller vehicle, yes, easily. But my pickup is a little bit too heavy. Tom set his fork aside. “Trust me, love. I won’t let anything happen to you.”

Harry nodded, fingering his own silverware nervously. “I’ll ask my father if he thinks it’s a good idea. And if I can go; I am an adult now, so far as the law goes, but I still live with my parents so…”

“Understandable, of course, but my door is always open should you wish to move in.”

Harry narrowly avoided inhaling his milk.

“I should hear from you on the matter soon?”

“Yeah. I’ll tell my dad to talk to you about it; he’ll probably want more information on where exactly we’d be going anyway.”

“I’ll be waiting for that visit. Or call. Whichever better fits his soonest convenience.” He picked up Harry’s plate and headed towards the kitchen sink. “I would assume that he’s currently at work.”

“Yeah. The PD always starts work early.” He said. “I should probably be headed home.”

“You should; I did tell your father I’d send you back around breakfast.” Tom turned off the faucet with his elbow, returned to where Harry was standing up from the table, and kissed him on the brow. He watched as the raven turned right red and scampered out the door.

He thought that he might have begun to get used to it by now, the fourth time. That maybe, just a little, the shock and horror might have dulled. That the sights might not have been so abominable. That the smell might not have affected him quite so much. But it seemed as if quite the opposite was true.

Every time they went to a scene the attacks seemed to grow worse. More blood. Less remains. Sixty percent of the skeleton, alone with all of the meat, was gone. The entrails had been piled up at the base of a tree and the heart, liver and lungs were nowhere to be found.

It had begun to rain early that morning and the weather had left the ground a churn of mud and scarlet. The victim, this time, had been a jogger rather than a prostitute; shreds of his exercise suit were scattered about alongside chips of bone and chunks of gristle and gore. Paw prints the size of his hands were driven deep into the mud, leading off into the trees.

“Get a cast of those!” James barked at the nearest crime scene processor, raising a hand to shield his face from the rain. The man quickly scrambled to do as he’d been told. “This animal is getting bolder. Attacking closer to sunrise. A different target, though arguably he had been more isolated out on the trails. What was this man thinking being out here even with the warnings?”

“Don’t know, Prongs. But we do have an ID for him; the thing seems to have hacked up his wallet while in the process of ripping him apart.” Sirius flipped the wallet open and pulled out driver’s license. “Bartimus Crouch Jr. Wouldn’t be able to tell just from his face with how disfigured his face is. Poor bastard.”

“And, once again, no one was around to see it.” Remus said, looking out towards where the trail of prints vanished into the trees. “But maybe we can figure out where it went if we follow its trail.”

“Maybe.” James said. “It’s long gone by now, but it’s worth a try.”

After alerting those around them to what they were doing the three set off after the prints and into the trees. The thin canopy which unfolded over their heads had deflected enough of the rain water to leave the prints faint but still distinguishable. Paws. Paws. Paws.

“What the hell?”

All three men stopped dead in their tracks at the edge of a narrow dirt road which lay on the other side of the small copse of trees. A trio of prints which stood out from the rest, a transition point from paws to…

“Are those…feet? *Boot prints*? From a *person*?”

“Yes. They are. It shouldn’t be possible but…that’s exactly what they are.”

“There has to be some other explanation for this. A natural phenomenon. Mud shifting or… *something*.

“Maybe you should talk to Riddle, Prongs.” Sirius said. “He was wearing a pair of boots last night. Boots that looked about that size.”

“’Oh, hey, Tom, I know you said you had Pagan Blood but you wouldn’t happen to be a werewolf would you?’. Because that’s a line of questioning which is *completely* reasonable.”

“The caste of the print should at least get us somewhere. If experts can’t tell us anything about it maybe Tom can.” Remus reasoned as they backed away from the shifted prints, heading back towards the scene. “He is a hunter, after all. He must have some knowledge of tracking animals.”

“I suppose, though even so I doubt he’d be able to give much insight into whatever this thing is. He might have a wealth of knowledge of British, or even European animals but he’s only just moved to Alaska.”

The rain had picked up while they were in the trees and rapidly drenched their shoulders the moment they stepped out from beneath them. A small tent-like structure had been hastily erected over the section of the prints which were being casted to prevent the rain water from interfering with the drying paste.

“If it *is* a wolf we can likely be certain that he can tell us. He worked at a sanctuary for them, so he must have seen prints from them before.”

The rain kept increasing as the day grew darker; everyone present scrambled to salvage as much of the scene as they could before it was all washed away.

Discouraging as it was that a great deal of evidence was likely destroyed by the weather the prints were the best step towards identifying the beast responsible that they had managed to take so far. And, this time, the scene of the killing was open enough that the smell wasn't overwhelming enough to have to destroy their uniforms afterwards.

James had never appreciated the ability to just throw his work clothes into the washer so much.

Harry left his bedroom and came down the stairs just as his father was finishing a cup of coffee.

"How was your night with Tom?"

"Couldn't tell you; I didn't wake up until the morning." He said. "Tom made us what he called an 'English Breakfast'. They eat some strange things over there in Great Britain."

James chuckled into the rim of his cup. "Yes, I've heard of Haggis."

"And blood sausage; he called it Black Pudding." Harry shuddered. "Tom invited me along on a hunting trip which he's going on in a few days. I'm worried about the animal attacks even though he said that we'd probably be out of its range. I said that I'd ask and have you call him; he gave me his number."

His father set the ceramic mug aside and took the slip of paper from his son. "I'll call him after dinner and ask; if it's really far enough out that the animal could no longer be in range you're free to go with him if you'd like to. Just…be careful. And I'm not just talking about the guns."

James couldn't help but smile when Harry dropped his mug.

Tomar Ridal

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the alarm clock sitting on the table beside his bed went off at 4:30 in the morning Harry almost jumped out of his skin. Barely awake enough to put two and two together that today was the day of the hunting trip and that he only had a half hour to get ready before he needed to meet Tom Harry pelted out of the room, ramming into his closed bedroom door before managing to open and walk through it, and rushed to jump into the shower.

Dressing quickly and tossing a clean change of clothes into a rucksack Harry tore out of the house and up the block towards Hill House. He'd intended to go to bed at about nine, knowing he had to wake up at an hour which was quite frankly ungodly, but had to skype his friends again to excitedly inform them about his upcoming 'date' and had been kept until well past midnight.

Running on somewhere around three hours of sleep and heading towards a day which would doubtlessly be filled with highly strenuous activity. Hopefully Tom wasn't too upset over the fact that he'd be slowing them down.

Nagini was sitting in the back of Tom's truck, tucked in amidst firewood, a tent and other camping supplies. She yipped at him excitedly but didn't attempt to get out of the vehicle, no doubt aware that attempting to do so would knock half of the supplies out onto the ground.

"Good morning, Harry." Tom smiled at him as he approached head to toe in camo hunting gear and with a cased rifle slung over his back. "Had trouble sleeping?" he reached out with the hand which wasn't holding the strap of the rifle case and traced the faint shadows under his eyes with the tips of his fingers.

"My friends kept me up a bit later than I wanted to." He admitted sheepishly. "Sorry, Tom. I might not be able to keep up."

"Don't apologize, Tom. We'll be out for two days; no rush." He slung the rifle into the truck. "I'll be giving that to you while we're out there; will teach you the basics of point and shoot once we get out to the campsite. It's a bit safer than what I prefer to use and I feel like a gun will make you feel safer if a predator shows up."

"What do you use?" what was there to hunt with aside from a gun?

"Modern hunting bow; compound. And I say that it's safer simply because, when it comes down to it, falling on a bullet isn't going to hurt you. Falling on an arrow, especially one with a stainless steel blade on its head, will." He said. "Ready to head out?"

"I am," Harry said, "where should I put this; it's just a change of clothes but, would you rather I throw it in the back or keep it in the cabin with me?"

“If they’re clothes you may want to keep them in the cabin with us, in case it rains.”

He had a point with that one. It had rained much of the day prior and the sky above them still threatened grey. Even if it didn’t storm again the bed of Tom’s truck still appeared to be a little damp.

At least he’d gotten rid of the blood.

Harry set the rucksack on the floor of the truck beside his feet and buckled himself in as Tom packed the last few items which he deemed necessary for their hunting trip. Nagini leapt through the back window and settled herself between them when the brunet finally slid into the driver’s seat.

“You’re free to fiddle with the radio all you want; it’ll be about a three hour drive.” Tom passed him another bag. Harry looked inside and found a thermos of tea and a couple of energy bars. “Didn’t know if you’d eaten yet. Thought I’d give you something in case you hadn’t.”

“Thanks,” Harry pulled out one of the bars and ripped it open, fiddling with the dials with the radio in search of a station he liked as Tom pulled out onto the street. Nagini shuffled closer and attempted to nick the energy bar from his hand but he was quick to pull it out of reach. “No, Nagini! That’s my breakfast!”

Tom chuckled as the dog let out an annoyed huff and stretched herself out in his lap.

“You’ve eaten already, dear. Too much human food will do nothing but turn you into a lard.”

Whether or not the brunet caught the betrayed look which his dog sent him wasn’t clear, but the smirk on his face didn’t wither in the slightest.

“You said that your friends kept you up last night?” he asked after about twenty minutes of lazy silence had passed. Harry, who had drifted off into a sort of dazed half-sleep, started and straightened up.

“Yeah. I was excited about the trip since you said it was…suggested that it might be…and they kept me up with all their questions.”

“And concerns?”

“They did have some concerns about the animal but those were fairly easily dismissed once I told them how far out we’d be.”

“There were no concerns about the fact that you’d be way out in the middle of nowhere alone with me?”

Harry blinked at him in confusion, his emerald eyes magnified tenfold by his glasses. “Why would they be complaining about me being alone in the middle of nowhere with you; don’t let Sirius’ paranoid concerns get to you. It’s not like you’re a murderer or something.”

Tom smirked. “The red head seemed to have a bit of a problem with me.”

“Ron?”

“No, love, the girl.”

“Ginny?” Harry quickly thought back to the day he’d brought his friends to Hill House to meet Tom. Hazy as his recollections were, he had to admit that Ginny had been a little bit… standoffish towards Tom. He turned a bit pink in embarrassment over not having realized that fact before. “I suppose you’re right in saying that she seems to have something against you that’s a little bit bizarre; you’ve never done anything to her and she knows I’m gay-I’ve been rather open with that little fact-so it can’t be jealousy…and come to think of it she was acting a little weird last night.”

Tom’s red eyes slid from the road to briefly peer at him. “Weird how?”

“Just asking strange questions.” He said. “Like what time I was leaving. How long we’d be gone. That sort of thing. Not particularly out of place, but…it just seemed like…I don’t know.” The raven dropped his gaze to his lap and scratched behind Nagini’s ears. “Maybe I’m making out of this then I should. It just seemed strange to me.”

Tom reached over and rested hand on the back of Harry’s neck, gently messaging the tips of his fingers into muscle and bone. “Instincts exist for a reason and are to be obeyed. Even dulled as they’ve become in the modern world they’re never wrong.”

“I suppose.”

The rest of the drive was made in silence which slowly relaxed into the comfortable one had between companions. The only sounds for a long time were the softly playing radio and the truck’s engine. The little snake shaped air freshener swung hypnotically from his rear view mirror. Harry’s eyes felt heavy lidded as he stared out the window at the country side.

The campsite which they finally arrived at was beautiful; a small clearing surrounded on three sides by towering trees and on the forth by a shallow clear stream. The clearing gave them a clear view of the cerulean sky, the clouds from the day before having finally dissipated, and would no doubt soon be filled with thousands of stars.

This far away from town, they were no doubt brilliantly visible.

“I can teach you to identify some of the summer constellations if you’d like.”

Had he said the part about the stars out loud? “I’d like that. If it isn’t too much trouble.”

“It’d be my pleasure.” Nagini trotted around behind Tom as he walked to the back of the truck and pulled the hatchback down. “Come and help me unpack; I’ll show you how to pitch a tent and start a fire and we’ll work on your aim a bit afterwards.”

It had been quite a few years since Harry had last been camping, and back then ‘setting up the tent’ had consisted of his father and Sirius struggling with the bars, snapping themselves with it more than once, and having to reassemble the thing twice after it collapsed. Tom’s approach was systematic and consice and resulted in no collapses.

Tom had brought a flint and started in place of the gasoline which he'd used to start the fire at home and he talked Harry through the process of properly assembling the firewood so that it wouldn't suffocate the tinder once it had been lit.

Finally half an hour before sunset, Harry found himself holding a hunting rifle in front of a line empty beer cans.

"Brace the butt of the rifle a bit lower, Harry. The kick could break your collarbone in you have to high up." Tom kept a hand on the bottom of the rifle's barrel. "Aim down the barrel; don't close one eye, it's a bad habit to have to break. Pull the trigger whenever you're ready."

Tom barely managed to finish the sentence before Harry did just that; the percussive blast sent birds flying up from the trees around them and the raven dropped the gun. The brunet pulled him away in alarm.

"Maybe don't let go next time; if that had gone off when it hit the ground someone could have been hurt or killed."

He didn't say it in a reprimanding tone but Harry still wilted under it. "Sorry."

"Don't apologize, love. Just don't do it again; it's a matter of safety." Tom handed the rifle back to him. "Let's try again; aim a bit higher this time."

Harry never did manage to hit any of the cans, and after darkness fell Tom was no longer comfortable with allowing him to use the rifle. Given the fact that he'd dropped it earlier the raven couldn't really blame him.

He didn't much trust himself with the firearm either.

Nagini entertained herself with a stick that she had found while Tom cooked them foil wrapped campfire dinners over the fire as the stars came out, Harry sitting beside him on a log.

"There's Delphinus."

Harry followed Tom's finger towards the grouping of stars in the sky. "Looks like a three year old tried to draw a trapezoid." When the brunet snorted, he asked "what's it supposed to be?"

"A dolphin. Delphinus is Latin for dolphin, and according to the Greeks, it's the image of a dolphin which convinced the Nereid Amphitrite to accept the wooing of Poseidon." He said. "According to my ancestors, the Celtics, it's the name of the ship of the pirate Ronan Red-stubble."

"Ronan Red-stubble? What, was Red beard too similar to Black beard? Did he not want to risk getting a copyrite strike?"

Tom rolled his eyes, carelessly reaching over to ruffle his already wild hair. "There's Vulpecula, the Fox. Originally, in the 17th century, it was regarded as a fox with a goose in its

mouth but the image was later divided into two separate constellations, Vulpecula and Anser. It's since been re-combined but one of the stars within it is still called Anser."

"You know a lot about Astronomy and Mythology."

"Astronomy is an interesting subject and has been practiced in some form for thousands of years, though it was known as Astrology then." Tom pulled the dinners out of the fire. "And mythology was something I grew up on; it's the basis of religion and the life blood of culture. And I have a closer relationship with it than most, given that the color of my eyes is supposedly the result of my relation to a monster."

"Well, we have a campfire; Harry said, unwrapping his dinner and picking up the corn on the cob. "I think a scary story would be right at home in this situation."

The brunet chuckled, the flickering light of the fire reflecting off his teeth. "I don't know, darling. I wouldn't want to *scare* you."

"I'm a big boy, Tom. I can handle it. And you'll be there to comfort me if I have nightmares, won't you?"

"Very well." He shifted into a more comfortable position on the log. "Almost three thousand years ago, before the English Isles were even on the radar of the mainland empires, my distant ancestor Tomar Ridal was born. Born on the night of the full moon to the howling of wolves. Born touched by Fitiarn, the Moon Goddess worshiped by the village he would come to lead. He was a good man, once. A proper alpha, as they'd have called him then, who protected his pack. A warrior and sorcerer of considerable strength, he had the ability to shapeshift into a wolf by wearing one's pelt much like the Skinwalker of Native American folklore."

"And then the Romans came. The Empire was, at the time, the strongest in the world and sought more power land and resources to fuel its hunger. But the Pagan peoples of the Isles, though divided, were proud and strong and set in their ways. They rebuffed the Roman's attempt at 'peaceful' conquest and, as a result, many of the separate villages were slaughtered. The Stag, Wild cats and Bears attempted to alley against them and were wiped out within three months. The wolves withdrew into their own and fortified their positions at White Paw Wash, prepared to wait the Romans out."

"A war of attrition?"

"I a way, yes." Tom said. "It was while Tomar was hunting for his people, running with the pack, that he fell into a Roman snare. I wrapped around his neck. Cut into his flesh. He would have died if a young Legionnaire named Harrison hadn't stumbled on him and cut him free out of compassion. And unknowingly found himself owed a life debt by Tomar."

"When he was later mauled within an inch of his life by a bear while out gathering more supplies Tomar repaid that debt and took him back to White Paw Wash to treat his wounds. He sent him back to his people with orders never to speak of the Pack's location on threat of death."

“Was his name really Harrison, Tom?”

“Yes, it was, and he was stubborn just like you.” Tom said, an edge of affection to his voice and his eyes oddly far away. “He kept coming back, trying to befriend the pack. Even after being shot at with arrows, caught in a pit-trap and treed by wolves. Tomar’s repeated demands he leave went ignored, and finally, when Harrison asked to prove himself, he was put before the judgement of the Goddess.”

“Did they kill him?”

“No, Harry. He passed Fitiarn’s judgement and was accepted by Tomar as an honorary member of the pack. That friendship facilitated a cautious trading relationships between the Romans and the Wolves, though White Paw Wash was still off limits to their forces at large. Prolonged contact between the pair ultimately led to a deeper relationship developing in secret; the Legionnaire and the ‘heathen’.” The brunet made a sharp huffing sound. “Tomar didn’t trust the empire from which his lover came. Harrison feared that their intimate relations would lead to violence if they were discovered. They married in secret in the custom of the pack. Kept the true nature of their contact discrete. It wasn’t enough. Another Legionnaire followed Harrison one day and saw them together. When Tomar learned that his mate could be in danger he sent him away in a place of safety to hide for fear that the Romans would come looking.”

“When Harrison came back down from the mountains three days later he found White Paw Wash destroyed, and when he couldn’t find Tomar amongst the rubble realized he must have been taken captive. He had a hero complex, the fool, and went running head first into a trap. He found the alpha caged, badly tortured and beaten within an inch of his life. And when he tried to save him he was caught and killed; Tomar saw it all before he was left out in the forest to die.”

“But hatred, Harry, is a powerful thing. And so is grief. As he lay there, bleeding, after having failed to protect his people and his mate Tomar begged his Goddess for the power to destroy the Romans. When she didn’t answer him he called upon a Demon instead and was transformed into a beast neither man nor wolf but both. He massacred the Roman Legion, slaughtering almost all of them in a single night and wounding many more. But what he didn’t realize until much later, through his warped perception of once humanity, was that in cursing the Roman’s he’d also cursed himself. Doomed himself to exist as a monster, craving human flesh, until the day he was destroyed.”

“A werewolf.” Harry said. “And when the Romans left…did he turn on the other people of the island?”

Tom nodded. “For a decade, Great Britain was his hunting ground. It wasn’t until the sole other survivor of White Paw Wash wounded him with a silver dagger gifted to them by Fitiarn that he was defeated. Imprisoned within a mountain laden with silver. But not killed. And when the Roman Legions returned again Tomar, whose hatred hadn’t faded, was released to fight against them.”

“I’m assuming he didn’t stick around afterwards to be put back into prison?”

“Would you?” he smiled when Harry shook his head. “He fought the full force of the hunger in order to hide, killing in secret and further spreading his curse with each full moon.”

“Was he ever killed? Or caught again?”

“According to the stories, no. The presence of Werewolves led, naturally, to the formation of what some would call Wolf Hunters. An order still armed with the dagger dedicated to destroying Tomar; to kill the source of the curse would end its ability to further spread and make putting down the remainder of the Werewolf population far similar.”

Harry scooted closer to him and looked around at the woods surrounding them; in the darkness they looked far more threatening than peaceful. “D-Do you think that a Werewolf could be responsible for the recent attacks? Or even…Tomar?”

Tom outright laughed at him, earning a pointed glare from his companion. “Harry, doll, there’s no such thing as Werewolves. You all but challenged me to scare you; apparently I went a bit too far.”

“You talked about it like it was history!”

“Because I figured that would work, I’m sorry love. I only wanted to frighten you a little bit I meant no harm.” The brunet pulled him close and he melted into his embrace, unknowingly seeking comfort and protection in the arms of the very thing he was so afraid of. Tom gently soothed him, murmuring soft comforts and holding him tight against his chest.

Too long. It had been too long since he’d held his Legionnaire. He hadn’t kept him close enough, back then. He should have gone with him. Should have fought harder. He should have been more careful.

He wouldn’t lose him again. He wouldn’t. Not to anyone.

“Tomar is to be pitied as much as he is to be feared, for his truly a tragic tale. He gently rubbed his hand up and down the quaking boy’s back. “It’s said that he would howl each year on the day and time of his mate’s death. That he would scour the land for Harrison’s return, even as he fled the Wolf Hunters. That he would kidnap children-boys with black hair and green eyes who shared his lover’s name-and would raise them.”

“To eat them?”

“No, for company. So that he could, for short periods, feel as if he was with his beloved again. But they were never right. Never truly *his* Harrison. They didn’t have the remnants of the ties that bound them in the ancient ceremony. He’d leave the human. They’d age, or fall ill, and die. And he’d move on. And search again. Always searching.”

“What would he do if he ever found the *real* Harrison?” he asked, pulling back enough to stare at Tom with his emerald eyes rounded with fear. “I may go by Harry but my real name is Harrison!”

“I can’t be certain, the legends don’t mention that, but were I him I’d renew the ceremonial marriage and then make you like me. Because then we’d both be immortal and you’d be with me forever; we’d never have to lose each other.”

Being with Tom forever did sound incredibly appealing. Harry couldn’t lie. “And we’d both be murderous man-beasts for the rest of the eternity.”

Was it terrible that a part of him wasn’t entirely opposed to that?

“Predator and prey, my dear.” He said. “Let’s turn in; it’s getting late and we’ll be up early to hunt tomorrow.” Tom whistled for Nagini and headed for the tent, holding the flap open for Harry and zipping it up behind them.

“Canvas is going to protect us from a giant killer man-wolf, is it?”

“Don’t worry, Harry. I’ll protect you from being kidnapped by the big bad nonexistent Werewolf.” Tom flopped carelessly down onto their shared air mattress and pulled him against him. Harry was all too happy to snuggle against him, his hair still standing on end from ghost story induced paranoia. “Good night, love.”

“Good night.” He grumbled into the brunet’s collar bone as Tom’s breathing evened out and the howling of wolves started up in the far distance.

Chapter End Notes

I may do a more in depth prequel of the story of Tomar and Harrison later but not sure yet. Let me know what you all think.

Deep in the Woods

Nagini trotted a handful of yards in front of them, her lithe black body weaving through the trees and undergrowth with a grace which Harry couldn't help but envy. Beside him, bow in hand and quiver full of arrows slung across his back, Tom picked his way forward in absolute silence despite the fact that he was wearing steel toed boots. The raven, meanwhile, was left to crash through the undergrowth crushing twigs and snapping vines no matter how hard he tried to emulate his two companions.

He felt certain that everything within ten miles had heard them coming by now. And all because of him.

Harry clutched his rifle to his chest in silence, not wanting to add anymore unnecessary noise pollution to the matter, despite desperately wanting to know exactly how it was that the brunet managed to pull off his soundless movements. Nagini he could understand, she was a wolf-hybrid and a predator thrown back into what could reasonably be called her natural environment, but Tom?

He just had to be unreasonably perfect in everything he did, didn't he?

"Slow down a bit; pay more attention to where you put your feet will lower the amount of noise which your movements cause." Tom said with a slight smile, crimson eyes never straying from the tree line in front of them. "There's no need for you to rush, Harry. I'm not going to leave you behind out here."

The raven nodded, turning his gaze from the trees which Tom was observing to the ground in front of him. More precisely onto his feet. Carefully placing them between where vines lay and beside twigs instead of on top of them.

The noise was, indeed, reduced but the overall change was marginal at best.

Harry sighed and Tom chuckled but the brunet cut off and stopped abruptly once he realized that Nagini had gone into a rigid point. Ahead of them, its massive form broken up by the trees, was a dark horned shape.

"Moose. Bull." The brunet's tone had dropped into something barely audible and motioned for him to creep slowly forwards. "We need to be careful. Handle this pretty much the same way we would a bear."

Harry didn't need to be told twice to be cautious around a moose; he'd grown up in the state and was fully aware of how dangerous they were. Have a wolf in your yard? That's fine. A black bear? Ignore. Grizzly? Eh, it'll go away. A moose? *Call the cops and hide under your bed!"*

Tom stopped about eight yards from the gigantic animal, his body half concealed behind the trunk of a gnarled pine. He again motioned Harry over and the raven reluctantly left his own cover to creep closer to the man.

“Whenever you’re ready, dove.”

The raven looked at him in confusion. “To what?”

“Shoot it.”

“You want *me* to shoot it?”

“They’re in season.”

“*Do you have a death wish, Tom?* What if I miss?”

“Don’t miss.” Tom supplied most unhelpfully. “Trials by fire are always the best way to learn. High stakes often produce the best results. Go on, then.”

Harry continued to stare at him in disbelief for a moment further before letting out a heavy sigh and propping the butt of his rifle against his shoulder. The raven took aim as best he could, peering down the rifle’s sites at the titanic potentially deadly animal, and pulled the trigger.

He winced when the gunshot rang out, but this time didn’t jump or drop the fire arm. But, like he feared, he missed.

The beast turned towards him, steam spilling from its gaping nostrils as its beady eyes focused in on him. Tom grabbed onto him a split second before it lowered its head and charged.

“*Get in the tree!”*

Harry couldn’t climb on a normal day, and hadn’t thought that he could to save his life, but apparently he’d been wrong. Adrenaline was a weird and wonderful thing which somehow managed to drag his scrawny ass fifteen feet up a ridgepole pine. Tom, meanwhile, was left to the mercy of the enraged animal.

It was like watching a matador in a bull pit. Tom sidestepped the charge and fired an arrow into its side. The beast screamed and rounded on him only to be attacked from behind by Nagini.

It spun around again, flinging the dog off of it and taking two more arrows to its other side. The moose charged at him again and Harry, certain that this time Tom would be caught and gored, cringed.

The animal collapsed barley three feet from him and the brunet, without so much as flinching, fired a final shot to put the thing out of its misery.

“Darling,” there wasn’t the slightest hint of panic in his voice, as if he were calling to him from the living room rather than from the base of a tree after having felled a viscous woodland creature. “You can come down from the tree now.”

The remaining arrows rattled in the quiver on his back as he bent, pulling his hunting knife from his boot and calmly slashing the moose's throat to begin to drain it of its blood. Harry went about clambering down from the tree as Tom moved forward in the process of cleaning the carcass. He barely had the time to touch the ground before the awful smell hit him; clutching his nose, Harry only narrowly managed to hold onto his breakfast.

"Tom!" Covered in blood up to his elbows the brunet made a questioning hum, scooping its entrails out into a shallow howl like some sort of demented ice cream. "Oh my God, how can you…it's awful!"

"You get used to the smell; just be glad I didn't completely open up the deer while we had it in the shed." Tom smirked, paying no mind to the small spurt of blood which streaked across his cheek. "They'd have probably have found you passed out on the ground from the shock and would have assume I'd hit you over the head with something."

He nudged Nagini away with his shoulder as she came around to sniff at the organs.

"It'll get better once I finish and bury them; stand a bit away until then if it really bothers you." He said. "And make sure you don't forget the rifle."

Remembering the firearm he'd dropped with a sudden jolt of surprise the raven hastily went to retrieve it, grateful for the fresh air which the opportunity provided. He watched as Tom finished up and buried the entrails and most of the blood before hesitantly moving closer.

The smell was still there, but it wasn't nearly as strong.

"How are we going to move that thing?" he asked as Tom tied a pair of sturdy ropes to the antlers of the beast. "It has to weigh at least as much as a horse."

"Probably slightly more." The brunet fashioned the other end of the rope into a pair of harnesses, tying one to himself and the other to Nagini. "But we're not going far."

"…You're going to…drag it? With…Tom, that's…what if you pull something? We're hours from the nearest hospital and I have no idea how to drive back from here!"

"Don't worry, doll," the brunet reached for him but seemed to think better of it at the last moment-no doubt remembering the blood gloves he had on-and dropped his hand much to the raven's relief. "I'm considerably stronger than I look."

He wasn't kidding when he said that, as Harry quickly learned. Like a pair of sled dogs in the Iditarod, Tom and Nagini somehow managed to drag the giant moose corpse all the way back to their camp in just under two hours.

How they'd manage to bring it back home with them Harry hadn't the slightest clue. By trusting it to the roof with the ropes which Tom had used to drag it there? Short of doing so he couldn't see how they'd accomplish it.

It turned out that the brunet hadn't thrown out the heart along with the rest of the organs. This Harry only found out after Tom had cooked and served part of the moose for their dinner.

“Do you have any idea what you look like eating a roasted heart on a wooden spit?”

“Not really.” The brunet swallowed and offered him the spit. “Want some?”

“N-No thanks.”

Tom shrugged. “Best cut of meat on the body; more for me.” He said. “Want a beer?”

“Did you bring Dittany?”

“I said a beer, not a keg. One can isn’t going to kill you; you’re not that much of a light weight and you’ll probably want to be a bit more…relaxed than usual.”

Harry felt the blush spreading across his face as he picked at his food. “Why would that be?”

The hand which wasn’t holding the pit slid upwards from his knee to his thigh. “We’re out here, alone, in the beautiful forest without anyone around to,” he shifted a bit closer, “interrupt. Of course, if you don’t feel like you’re ready, then we’ll wait. But loosening up a bit before you think it over may be helpful.” The little raven was as red as a lobster now. “But that won’t be until later tonight. You need to eat.”

Doing so was rather difficult when the brunet kept ‘innocently’ touching him.

“T-Tom.”

He paused, crimson eyes regarding him in confusion. “You only have to tell me you’re not ready. Or to stop at any time. I will.”

“It isn’t that.” It’s just…I don’t know what I’m doing and…” Harry trailed off and shifted uncomfortably.

“I’d be concerned if you did, given your singularity in the area prior to my arrival.” Tom’s hand was warm and slowly calloused as it rested on his cheek and Harry leaned into it. “But you don’t need to be worried. I’m not about to hurt you and I expect nothing more than what you’re willing it give me.” His thumb gently traced the curve of his cheek. There was something strange in the older male’s crimson gaze, as if he were looking at something he hadn’t seen for many years. Something precious which he’d longed for for a very long time and finally found again. It made him feel warm as much as it did uneasy.

All thoughts scattered the instant that Tom kissed him. Pulling him close against his body and into his lap to straddle his waist. Holding him both as if he never wanted to let go and was terrified of breaking him. His lips, like his hands, were warm and soft and gently guided his to move, conform and, finally, part.

Harry’s hands slid up Tom’s strong arms and over his broad back. Feeling the contours of his muscle and the texture of the fabric under his fingertips and the warmth of his skin beneath his palms. Up further over the back of his neck and into his hair, catching handfuls of his soft brown curls.

He tasted of iron and sweetness and something which could only be Tom. He smelled just as he had on the first day they'd met, only now, with their proximity, it was stronger and unfiltered by the conflicting smells of car leather and fresh baked cookies. Wood smoke and pine. The open forest in the rain. Night air. And something…feral. Dog like, but wilder. Well, he was always with Nagini who he'd admitted was part wolf so maybe that was what it was?

Tom was making a motoring sound, half way between a cat's purr and a dog's growl as he moved along his jaw and down his neck. His teeth, quite suddenly seeming a bit too long and sharp, pressing into the soft skin of his throat.

He gasped in alarm when Tom suddenly stood, clinging to Tom's waist and shoulders to keep himself from falling. The snarl that the brunet made in response was terrifying, but Harry was a bit too distracted by where they were headed and what was going to happen there to really register how *wrong* the sound was coming from a human.

Tom didn't bother to zip the flap closed behind them; detaching the raven from around his waist after he'd dropped him onto the air mattress.

"Strip." He ordered, pulling his own shirt over his head as he did so. Harry stared at his chiseled chest, eyes roving hungrily over the contours of his muscles while doing his best to ignore the traces of the same scars which covered his back that had somehow managed to crawl their way onto his front. "And get down on all fours."

He was working on the button of his pants by the time Harry finally managed to snap himself out of it and turn his attention to his own state of dress before any new sights could paralyze him.

Not knowing quite where to put his clothing, he simply tossed them onto the floor to join Tom's and then promptly followed his instructions. He flinched slightly when Tom's hand fell on his naked back, tracing lightly along his spine.

"You're shaking." His hand gripped his hip lightly, joined by the other. "You're afraid."

"I'm not afraid." The raven winces at the waiver in his own voice. "Just nervous. I can't see what you're doing from this position and it's a little bit concerning."

"But you trust me?" Harry bit his lip and nodded. "You'll be fine." His hand moved again, from his hips to his bottom. Gently kneading the pale globes with his long fingers and chuckling when the smaller male's breath caught. The slight gasp turned abruptly into a startled squeak when he parted them and dragged his tongue over the revealed flesh.

"Tom!"

The brunet ignored him, licking him again before probing his puckered entrance and slipping inside. Harry shuddered and buried his red face in the air mattress below him as Tom continued his work. Burrowing deeper. Adding one finger and then two and patiently working him open. He slid inside him gently once he'd deemed him prepared enough. Draping his larger taller frame over Harry's back and reattaching himself to the side of his

neck. Kissing and sucking and leaving marks which would surely turn a dark blue black by morning.

He didn't move further until the raven wined and pushed against him, mewling when Tom started in a steady rhythm. Dragging him upright and against his chest. Reaching around to stroke his weeping member, the smaller male bucking into his hand as his head fell back against Tom's shoulder. Black hair splaying out across the brunet's collarbone, green eyes hazed and half lidded and his jaw slack.

Harry was still dazed after it was all over and he was being clutched protectively against Tom's chest. The older male's face buried in his hair. His body feeling boneless with the slowly fading afterglow.

"Tom?" he managed after close to twenty minutes of recollecting his voice for use in proper words. The brunet answered with a half asleep noise and shifted slightly beside him. "What are we? Are we actually together? Is this just a onetime thing or…we never really made it clear."

Tom struggled with the heavy weight of oncoming sleep for a moment before managing to answer him. "Mine." His arms tightened and he rolled over, pulling the smaller male on top of him.

Harry smiled and rested his head on his chest.

At the Wolf's Table

“I might have gotten a bit carried away.” Toom peered at him over the rim of his sunglasses as they drove up the street towards Hill House. “Sorry.”

“Huh?” Harry looked over at him in confusion. Tom pointed to his own neck in a gesture clearly meant to point out the generous spattering of hickeys which had, just as the raven had half-feared, bloomed into blue-black bruises. The brunet, in honesty, seemed more proud of himself for making them than even the slightest bit apologetic and Harry lowered the hand which he’d involuntarily been using to subconsciously rub at some of the most visible ones. “Oh. Uh…don’t apologize, Tom. I don’t regret what happened last night and it felt amazing at the time it’s just…”

“Your family will tease you?”

“’Tease’ is a bit too weak of a word, I think.” He watched the fat streaks of blood running down the windows and windshield from the moose which Tom had tied to the roof of the truck; it seemed like his efforts to drain the carcass the night prior had only gone so far. “Last night really was amazing, by the way. I…we definitely need to do that again.”

Tom flashed him his usual lopsided smirk and reached over Nagini to gently squeeze the raven’s knee. “Oh, we will. It’s only a matter of time before I spirit you away and we elope, traveling the world together for the rest of our lives. Which will be very long. *Very* long.”

“I’m not allowed to catch any fatal illnesses. Noted.” Harry covered Tom’s larger hand with both of his, idly playing with the older man’s long fingers. “But that means you’re also not allowed to get sick or injured.”

“Don’t worry about that, Harry. I’m very…durable.” His thumb rubbed a gentle pattern into the side of his leg. “It’ll take a lot more than a cold or a flesh wound to take me down.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Tom, because I really don’t want to lose you. Especially considering you moved into a supposedly cursed house.”

The brunet laughed loudly, making the dog between them jerk awake in surprise, as he pulled into the driveway. “Oh yes, I heard about the ‘curse’. It’s part of why I got the house so cheap.” Tom pulled the stick shift into park. “I’m not worried about it. I’ve had *plenty* of experience with curses; it kind of runs in my family.”

The little raven rolled his eyes as he pulled open the door, checking to make sure he wasn’t going to end up with blood dripping onto him, and then jumped out of the truck. “And there’s no need to elope, Tom. My parents would be perfectly supportive of us having a wedding. Not right away, but eventually…Though you should probably be prepared for more of my Dad’s cheesy paganism jokes.”

“I’m a bit impatient and would rather have you be all mine as soon as possible.” He was already all his, as far as his wolf was concerned. Had been since centuries before. Their

activities the night prior had only reaffirmed their bond as mates, and come the next full moon at the end of that week he'd preform the bonding ritual again and turn his Legionnaire. There'd be no need for his family or friends. There would only be a need for their pack. "But if it would make you happy, we can have the traditional 'white wedding' of your dreams a few years after we've 'been to Vegas'."

"I've never been to Nevada." Harry chuckled as Tom passed him the smaller pocket knife he had on his person in addition to the massive blade he'd used on the moose. "They say that it's hot in Las Vegas."

"It is in the middle of the Mojave Desert, dove." One of the ropes snapped under the blade in Tom's hand.

He grimaced at the thought. "I'm probably melt. You'd be marrying a puddle on the ground; do you really want that Tom?" the little raven hissed softly when the knife he held slipped slightly, narrowly avoiding cutting his finger.

"I'd still love you even if you were only a puddle, Harrison." Freeing the final rope holding the moose onto the roof of the truck and started the reverse of the process which he'd used to get the giant animal up there in the first place Tom smiled at him. "Because even if you were a puddle you'd still be you. And a puddle of you is better than nothing."

"…Thanks? I guess."

Tom smirked at him over the top of the bed of the truck. "Not a problem, gorgeous." He winked and watched the raven's flustered reaction with great amusement. "Let your parents know that we bagged this beast and that there's no way I'll be able to eat it all on my own. I'll have the three of you for dinner tomorrow night."

"I hope you mean *over* for dinner, Tom. Grammar saves lives."

"That it does, I suppose." The brunet said. "Run along and let your family know that you weren't eaten by the beast over the weekend. I can handle things from here."

Harry had safely returned to town, Tom Riddle was back at Hill House, Fred and George were still over at Lee's and Ginny wasn't about to wait any longer to turn on the feed from the cameras that they'd placed. It was nearly midnight and had gotten dark; that her brothers weren't there was entirely their fault and she could always record anything of note on her phone should it happen.

Sitting down in front of her desk and sliding her headphones onto her head Ginny flipped on her laptop and opened the feed.

The next twenty minutes were spent staring fixedly at the dark face of Hill House; both Riddle and his vehicle were gone, though where he was and what he might be doing she had

no idea. Just when she was about to give it up for the night and go to bed headlights flooded the long drive with white and the dark green pickup pulled onto the screen.

The headlights died and the engine cut out. Two people-Riddle himself and a woman she couldn't identify, judging by her smaller size and the way in which she clung to his arm-emerged from the cabin and headed towards the house.

He unlocked the door and held it open for her. Lights turned on as the pair ascended the stairs to the second floor and entered what Ginny assumed was a bedroom. The broad brunet held the woman-a willowy blonde decked out in jewelry and wearing a tight golden dress-in front of the window which overlooked the back yard, no doubt pointing out something to do with the view despite it being too dark to see much beyond the glass.

Ginny glared at the screen, grabbed her phone and began to record. Murderer or not, this supposedly gay bastard was *cheating* on Harry, her friend, with a *woman hooker*! Not that it would be any less asinine of him if it was a man hooker but-.

Her thoughts were derailed when his eyes began to glow a bright scarlet and his grip tightened, and nearly dropped her phone in horror when he bit down, driving his dagger teeth into her throat.

Blood splattered the window and the woman screamed, struggling to free herself from his grip as muscles bulged and crawled beneath his skin. He dragged her to the ground and the light flickered and went out when the lamp in the room toppled onto the floor.

When Tom rose to right it the shade dislodged and rolled away; the harsh light of the naked bulb revealed his blood splattered chest and twisted his face. Once handsome features had warped into something nightmarish, trapped half way between animal and man; pointed ears, glowing eyes and fangs set into a protruding muzzle. It seemed for a moment as if he stared at her. Not at the camera hidden in the tree, but at her. And then he yanked the curtains over the window sharply closed, leaving Ginny to sit in her chair and shiver.

"He's certainly done a lot of work on it." Lily remarked as they approached the newly painted front porch; it hadn't been done before they'd left for the hunting trip so Harry could only assume that Tom had done it that morning. "Hill House is actually starting to look like a house."

"Wait until you see the inside," he said, mounting the steps after checking to make sure that it wasn't covered in wet paint; tracking that into his brand new boyfriend's house. "Tom and I have been working on it for a while; he's taught me a lot about renovations and I like to think that I've gotten pretty good at them."

"You're correct to think that, Harry; your help is much appreciated. It certainly saves me a considerable amount of time." Tom leaned against the frame of the open door, barefoot for the first time which Harry had ever really seen him and wearing a white t-shirt over a loose

set of black camo cargo pants. They hung incredibly low on his hips and Harry had to struggle not to stare. “Glad that three of you decided to come. James. Lily?” he smiled when his mother nodded and stepped forward to shake her hand. “Tom Riddle. Your new neighbor and now official boyfriend of your son. Good to have the chance to finally meet you.”

“You as well, Tom. I’ve heard a great deal about you from both my son and my husband.”

“Shall we head inside? Dinner is almost ready and I’m sure that we’ll be able to talk more comfortably in my kitchen than out here.” He crushed a mosquito which had landed on his arm, smearing red blood across the black lines of his tattoos. “The bugs are bloody awful.”

With the little raven happily slung under his arm he led the way back through the door, closing it behind them to cut off the insects’ route of entry. The house smelled amazing; the ventilated air filled with the rich scents of cooking meat and vegetables and earthy spices all emanating from the massive pot bubbling on the sleek modern stove. Harry’s stomach growled and his mouth watered.

“That’s the moose we caught, isn’t it?” he asked as the brunet headed for the fridge.

“That it is, angel. A part of it, at least; I’ll be eating off that thing for most of the season. And as for the head, well, that’s off being taxidermied. I’ll let you know when it’s done; if you want it.” He pulled open the fridge. “Drinks, anyone? We have tea, a couple different types of juice, some soda, milk, beer, assorted wine coolers and water. Obviously.”

“Tea sounds good.” Lily said as Nagini trotted over curiously.

“I’ll take a beer, Riddle.”

“Um…soda, I guess. I’d rather avoid drinking tonight.”

Tom shrugged, handing a can of coke to Harry before gathering a bottle of tea and two cans of beer and nudging the door closed with his hip. “Suit yourself, darling.” He said. “Go and sit at the table; the stew should be ready by now.”

Tom pulled down bowls and doled out the stew with a ladle as Harry went to join his parents at the kitchen table. The brunet set the bowls in front of each of them before he sat down himself.

“I heard that you’re from England, Tom?” Lily asked as they tucked into their meal. Nagini nudged Tom’s leg, no doubt in an effort to be fed from his plate, and whined.

“I am.” He gently pushed the stubborn hound away only to have her repeat her antics with Harry; the raven scratched behind her ears but didn’t let her lick his spoon like the dog had no doubt hoped. “I was born and raised in a port town in Kent called Ramsgate. I was raised almost solely by my mother; my father left when I was eight though not before…making his mark. I prefer not to discuss my childhood in any detail for that reason.”

“Why did you move all the way up here to Alaska? It seems a bit far to go.”

“I suppose that it is.” Tom rested his chin on his hand, stirring his stew as he waited for it to cool down. Harry hadn’t bothered to, happily risking burning off his tongue in order to put an end to his growling stomach. “But I needed a change of pace, was being stalked by someone out to kill me-no, unfortunately, I’m not joking-and Alaska offered ample space and opportunity to engage in my favorite hobby. It was either moving or engaging in life or death battle royale, so I left.”

Harry cringed in pain when his teeth come into contact with something hard. Had he bitten into a piece of bone? A bit of metal which had broken off one of the tools which he’d used to cook with? Confused, Harry reached up and pulled the offending object from his mouth.

All conversation ground to a halt, all three adults left staring at the charm bracelet which dangled from his fingers in silence.

Tom cleared his throat and sat back in his chair. “Well, at least now I know where mother’s jewelry went.” He said. “I threw it into one of the pots while I was moving to keep it all in once manageable place and…forgot. I didn’t look in the pot before I used it; that was my fault. Sorry.”

“This belongs to your mother?” He dropped the bracelet onto the table with a dull thump. It seemed like something which would be worn by someone considerably younger than the age Tom’s mother would have had to be. Not to mention very modern.

“It did. I held onto a few pieces after she died. Nostalgic reasons.” He said. “I’ve definitely learned to check my pots for nonfood items before I use them in the future. And to take a metal detector to everything I make before I serve it to guests; I’ll have to dredge the stew once it cools down to find it all.”

James broke the awkward atmosphere which had fallen over the room with a snort. “Did you drink earlier today, Riddle?”

“…Maybe a little.” Tom admitted sheepishly.

Harry couldn’t help but think that his boyfriend was a killer actor.

“Have any further attacks happened while we were away? Have you had any breakthroughs in the case?” the brunet acted quickly to reset the topic.

“No, to both of your questions.” His father’s mood shifted into grimness. “We managed to cast a print at the last attack and got it back from the experts today. They don’t know what it is.”

“That’s unfortunate.” Tom said. “How are you even going to begin to handle this thing when you don’t even know what it is?”

“I don’t know but I’d hoped that you, being a hunter, might be able to identify it when they couldn’t. I brought it over with me.” He said. “Would you mind taking a look?”

“Not at all.”

James removed what looked like a white plaster fossil from the bag he'd brought with him and passed it over the table to Tom. The brunet stared at it for a few moments before he frowned and set it down on the table. Harry stared at its size in alarm.

"It's definitely canine. Lupine, more specifically." He said. "I'd need to see more than one print, the actual tracks preferably, to be able to tell if it was bipedal quadrupedal or something in between though but from the size of the print this thing had to have been seven or eight feet tall. Predatory, doubtlessly. And intelligent to have avoided being seen. But I can't say much more than that; I hunt game, not monsters, and I've never seen anything like this before."

"What do you suggest that we do? Is there anything we *can* do?"

"Unless there's some way for you to predict where it will next strike, I don't think there is." His lips turned upwards into an almost imperceptible smirk. "Though I'd suggest you all watch your backs on night patrol. Especially come the next full moon."

In the Dark of the Night

“’Watch yourselves come the next full moon’?” Sirius repeated from the passenger seat, looking over at his partner with a raised eyebrow. It was approaching one in the morning and outside the windows of the cruiser there was nothing but black. They really weren’t all that far from town, the lights from Godric’s Hollow could be seen half a mile to their right, but the stars and moon were both concealed behind the clouds and there was nothing passed the city limits to illuminate the darkness beyond the headlights of the car. “Watch out come the next full moon; that’s it? That’s all Riddle said? No suggestion as to what we were supposed to do to ‘watch’ ourselves? No explanation as to why? Come on, Prongs, the thing hasn’t been reserving itself to the full moon so what does that have to do with anything?”

“I don’t know; Riddle refused to say any more. He just sat there sort of…smirking.” James said, keeping his eyes on the dark road ahead of them. “Harry looked uncomfortable with the conversation; when I asked him about it later he told me a story which Riddle had apparently told him while they were on their camping trip. About a werewolf, or werewolf like monster. It’s ridiculous to say this but between this thing’s ability to go unseen, the destruction which it’s capable of and those prints-.”

He was cut off by the sharp fizz of the radio on the dash, the dispatcher’s voice coming through between gouts of crackling static. “Attack in progress; unit 549 requesting back up. Nearest unit please proceed to their location immediately.”

“Unity 549?” Sirius’ wide silver eyes reflected the pale glow of the dash as James yanked the wheel to the right, sending the cruiser spinning around. “That’s-.”

“Remus!” He slammed on the accelerator, clods of dirt and lose rock spraying up behind them before the back wheels caught traction and the car shot forwards at speeds which bordered on illegal. The sirens screamed atop the car, flashes of red and blue light shattering against the stones and trees which they rocketed passed as they flew down dirt lanes and skidded around corners.

They arrived to a scene of carnage beyond anything that they’d yet seen; the other cruiser was totaled, the hood wrinkled and belching smoke and its roof now resembled an aluminum can which had been stomped on and then repeatedly run over by an eighteen wheeler. Its head lights flickered and flashed, joining their own in illuminating the human cast of the beast’s attack.

The hard-packed dirt of the road was soaked scarlet with blood, torn fabric from a police uniform and severed limbs lay strewn about like a child’s toy. Drag marks led off into the darkness, glistening a sickly crimson.

Remus lay just on the edge of the circle of white cast by the headlights covered in blood and clearly wounded but still alive.

“Moony!” Both men tumbled from their own cruiser and rushed towards their friend. Sirius lunged for the other man while James drew his wide arm on reflex, hazel eyes scanning the

darkness for any signs of danger but finding none. Not that that provided any measure of relief.

It was so dark out there that the thing could have been standing a foot away from them and he wouldn't have been able to see it.

"Moony! Moony, please, wake up!" Sirius shook him wildly, prompting blear amber eyes to open and stare up at them. They were unfocused from the blood loss and shock but terror was still plainly evident etched across his features. "Oh, thank God!"

"Padfoot? Prongs? What are…why are you here?"

"Why are we here?" James joined his partner in crouching beside their friend and beginning to go over his wounds. Deep claw marks and slashes from broken glass, but no bites. It looked less like he'd been mauled and more like he'd been subdued and dragged out into the middle of the street.

Like bait.

"What do you mean 'why are we here?'" Sirius demanded. "Someone called in a 10-78 over an attack in progress; it had to be either you or your partner."

Remus' eyes were nearly bugging out of his skull and he seemed well and truly out of his mind with fear. He'd always been the calmest member of their little group of friends and seeing him like this now was more than just a little bit concerning. "No, it wasn't-! *It* called into dispatch! It's not a normal-It can *talk*! It's not a human voice, but…I…I heard it! It's smart and it's planning something!"

The other two exchanged drawn looks, both their faces gone suddenly pale. "Moony, you're in shock. You must have-."

"*No!"*

"Remus-."

James was cut off when his wild eyed friend grabbed him by the collar, the rest of his body making a failed attempt to rise from the blood splattered ground and bolt for their idling cruiser. "It's. Still. Here!"

Something slammed into the already shattered windshield of the totaled cruiser, sending the remaining glass tinkling onto the ground as whatever had been thrown lodged in the opening. A hunk of broken bones, ground meat and gristle which had once been a human torso. James jumped so badly that he accidentally fired his gun, the bullet ricocheting off of the destroyed vehicle and vanishing into the night. Sirius swore, grabbed Remus' other arm and dragged him to his feet.

"Come on, Prongs, we need to get out of here!" The other man had dragged Remus halfway back to their own car before realizing that James hadn't moved, his eyes focused on where the piece of the corpse had come from. "*Prongs!"*

“I want to see it.” And he meant it. He wanted to see it. To know, finally, what sort of creature was responsible for terrorizing the city and putting his family in danger. “I want to know what this damn thing is!”

A ragged snarl tore from just beyond the circle of light shed by the car’s headlights and a pair of glowing red eyes the size of tennis balls came into view. The grip of his gun felt cold and slick in his shaking hands as he slowly backed away towards the driver’s side of the cruiser; seeing him coming, Sirius hurriedly opened the door for him.

The creature followed, prowling forward in a hunched posture with its massive form close to the ground. A wolf’s head set atop a thick neck and broad shoulders, its body a warped semblance of human covered in corded ropes of gnarled muscle and dark brown fur. Its pointed ears were pinned back and its tail flicked back and forth as it paused to watch him. Black lips drawn back over vicious yellow fangs lined in bloody drool.

A guttural growl echoed in its barrel chest, sounding much more like a tiger than anything canine, as its blazing eyes bore holes into him. Daring him to move. To lose his nerve and bolt.

And then it stood, drawing itself up to its full towering height and letting out a blood curdling howl. Unable to stand his ground any longer James opened fire in the hopes of bringing the thing down, or at least scaring it away, but to his horror the bullets did nothing to dissuade the monster. Lead shattered against its chest, the shards falling uselessly to the road at its feet.

It let out a snarling yowl and started forward; he threw himself into the open door and slammed down the accelerator once again.

“*Hold on!”*

The wolf-creature’s body broke the windshield when it struck it. Pinging against the roof with a huff and a growl and tumbling down onto the road again with a heavy thump. James pulled the car back around, once more flooding the scene of the attack with light, and revealing the monster’s fallen form.

“Is it dead?”

“That thing can’t be anything but road kill; Prongs hit it going almost fifty. I-oh, Jesus Christ, it’s getting up! It’s getting-*hit it again!”*

The beast had pounced before he had the chance, sailing across the ten yard distance and landing atop the hood with a force which crippled the engine. Smoke and sparks belched from the crumpled hood. The beast drew back one of its arms-stretched-long, clawed fingers balling into a fist-and slammed it into the glass. Once. Twice before it shattered, spraying the three of them with shards of glass. Sirius started firing wildly at it in a desperate, futile effort to drive it off just as James had earlier. James, for his part out of bullets, threw his gun at the thing instead.

It bounced off its short muzzle and only succeeded in drawing its attention solely onto him. The flaming eyes narrowed into dangerous slits, then widened just as quickly. The creature

leaned forward towards him, peering closely into his glasses, and then pivoting its head to examine the clock which had been reflected in the lenses.

It snarled again, the ferocious sound transforming into stilted words. “Must be done at night. I’m out of time for games.”

The creature leaped from the hood of the car and bolted away into the darkness, vanishing as quickly as it had appeared. They needed to get out of there. Needed to get Remus to the hospital immediately. The engine was shot and the car refused to start up again; James pulled the radio down from its hook as he looked over at his partner, staring dazed and pale faced after where the beast had disappeared.

“Do your best to stabilize him while we’re stuck out here; I’m calling for help.”

Harry was startled awake by the sound of breaking glass. Sitting bolt upright in bed he was met with the sight of what could only be described as a monster crawling in through the widow of his room. All muscle, dark fur and glaring eyes.

Harry screamed and toppled out of bed with a thump as the beast made it inside completely and rose to his full height. Its broad back and massive shoulders brushing against the ceiling as it turned towards him. Footsteps rushed down the hallway and the door of his room flew open, revealing his mother on the other side.

Lily caught sight of the creature in his room as screamed as well, grabbing the lamp from the nearby table and flinging it at the beast. It bounced off the side of its head, breaking on the floor, and the beast turned with a low snarl, baring its massive teeth as it set its focus on her.

His father wasn’t in the house to save them, the creature responsible for multiple brutal deaths was looming over the foot of his bed, and it had its sights set on his mother!

Harry always had been impulsive, and apparently even mortal terror wasn’t enough to change that. Armed with a shoe which just happened to be in reach, he threw himself at the beast and swung.

The show flew out of his grip when his back hit the wall near the ceiling, crumpling into a dazed heap between his bed and the window. Beginning to slip in and out of consciousness Harry hear his mother scream and the creature huff. And then it was touching him. Its long fingers gripping his shoulder to turn him onto his back as if to check for injuries. Surprisingly gentle despite the strength the beast must have possessed to be able to throw him into the wall to begin with.

“Harrison.” The word was badly mangled, buried beneath layers of growling, but Harry knew that he had heard it. The thing had said his name. Huge and wolf-like, just like the monster from Tom’s story was supposed to be, and it had *said his name!* Through the darkness he caught sight of the hilt of the sword Tom had given him sticking out from underneath the bed.

Well, it was certainly better than a shoe.

Harry lunged for the blade and caught hold of the hilt before the creature could react, dragging it out of the scabbard and plunging it into one of its paws. The curved blade pierced straight through the monster's leg, its silver tip coming away painted scarlet with blood.

It screamed in pain, the sound too human to be describable as anything but haunting, and tore itself free of the weapon before fleeing back into the night. Taking almost the entire wall with it when it did so. Harry sagged back onto the floor of his room, the sword clattering to the ground beside him as the world began to spin. The adrenaline draining from him like blood from an open wound along with the strength to stay awake. The last thing he saw before losing consciousness completely was his mother's worried face.

Tender Loving Care

The hospital room was an awful, white washed beige and the tile floor was covered in scuffmarks from the shoes of countless worried visitors to patient's past. The artificially chilled air raised goosebumps along to the exposed flesh of his powerful arms and rested heavy on his skin, the harsh white lights reflecting colors off the thick lines of his tattoos like motor oil on water. The smells of metal, rubbing alcohol and blood were cloying and made his nose burn, setting his teeth on edge. The wolf within him paced and snarled, agitated by the high pitched bleep of the heart monitor in the room.

The tightly bandaged wound twinged and burned, the itch of his accelerated healing a minor annoyance fizzling at the furthest reaches of his awareness. A discomfort not quite severe enough to be a true distraction in any regard. His hands curled into fists and released again, fingernails biting into his palms and doing nothing to release the building pressure of his rage.

Tom Riddle was furious. He'd wasted too much time with the 'police', had failed to capture his mate, would now be forced to another *entire* moon cycle to fully reaffirm their bond and turn him, and on top of it all he'd hurt him.

His precious mate. His beloved Legionnaire. He'd hurt him. He hadn't meant to, of course, it had simply been a snap reaction when the raven had lunged at him, but it had been done. And his little mate had retaliated in kind, using the blade which he'd given him. The silver-edged weapon he'd taken as a trophy years before off the body of a defeated Wolf Hunter.

He was lucky that Harry had only stabbed him in the foot and not anywhere more vital.

His Legionnaire was safe, at least. Wouldn't suffer any long term damage from the injuries he'd sustained. For that much, Tom was thankful. Sitting through the treatment for his leg, citing a 'renovation accident' in order to avoid suspicion, had been bad enough; the 'doctors' had been forced to sedate him to get him to sit still long enough to be treated, and though his body had burned through the dosage far faster than a normal man would have Harry's treatment had already concluded.

Such was probably for the best; he might have thrown someone through a window otherwise.

His parents had been relieved to see him; Remus was still in the ICU from the injuries he'd sustained during their encounter the night prior and his presence allowed them to go and visit their more critically wounded friend without concern for their son waking up to find himself alone. They still popped in from time to time, at a rate of about twice an hour, and during one of these times Tom had secured his best chance yet of obtaining his ultimate goal.

He'd done considerable damage to Harry's room on his way out and said damage would take just over a month to repair. Opening his guest bedroom to his boyfriend was second nature. After all, what was a good partner for?

A soft groan snapped the brunet out of his brooding. Bleary green eyes peered up at him in a daze from amidst the hills of pillows and sheaths and his wolf snarled for him to scent his mate and ensure he well and truly unharmed. Tom forced it down, reaching out to cup his cheek instead; the little raven made a confused sound and leaned into his warm touch.

“Tom?” Harry struggled to focus his gaze but ended up going cross eyed.

The brunet smiled at him. “Yes, dove, I’m here.”

“What happened?”

He scooted a bit closer, taking the smaller male’s other hand and rubbing soothing circles into the back of it with his thumb. “What do you remember?”

“The monster. It broke into my room last night.” His eyebrows knit together into an expression of endearing confusion. “I can’t remember clearly.”

“Don’t try too hard, you’ll hurt yourself.” He chuckled softly when Harry stuck out his bottom lip in a pout. “You have a concussion and a few bruised ribs. On top of that, you cracked your tibia when you fell. Cracked, not broken. You’ll still be in pain for a while but you won’t be needing a cast.”

Harry grumbled sleepily in response, reaching up with his uninjured arm to pin Tom’s had to his face.

“Your room has also been utterly destroyed.” He went on. “I’ve already spoken with your parents on the matter and it’s been decided that you’ll be staying with me while the repairs are done. Is that alright with you?”

He chose to interpret the soft sound which he made before nuzzling closer as an affirmative answer.

“They have you on the good stuff, don’t they?”

“I like your voice, Tom. Have I ever told you that? It sounds like…like…I like your voice.”

Yep. It was definitely Morphine; he’d been able to smell the sweetness of the opiates in his blood already but his ridiculous reactions confirmed as much. “I’m glad that you like my voice, my love.” He said, gently sliding the hand which had been cupping his face free of Harry’s grip and carded it instead through his wild black hair. Still soft, just as he’d remembered. There was a tender, raised bump where his head had hit the wall; the little raven whined softly as his long fingers probed the area. Tom stopped, leaned down and kissed his forehead.

When he pulled back he was met with the sight of an adorable pout.

“What’s wrong, dove?”

“No!”

“’No’?” he repeated, one eyebrow tilting upwards. “’No’ what?”

“That was a bad kiss, Tom! Bad! Give me a good kiss; I want a good kiss!”

The brunet choked back a snort; if it hadn’t been for the fact that it resulted from an injury, Tom might have considered seeing the raven high as a kite more often. “Are you calling me a bad kisser, Potter?”

“No, but that was a bad kiss!” He whined, pout deepening. “I want a good kiss, Tom. Make me feel better.”

“And what, exactly, is a good kiss?”

Harry’s uninjured arm flew upwards so quickly that he almost slapped himself in the face. He pointed to his mouth with one finger. “Lips!”

“Lips?” his own curled into a devious smirk as he leaned down again. “You mean like this?”

Harry mewled when Tom kissed him again, his arms clumsily rising to knot his fingers in his hair. The brunet broke the kiss quicker than either of them would have liked, and he rested his forehead against the raven’s.

“I’m glad that you’re alright.” He said quietly. “I love you; I mean it, doll. And…I’d never hurt you on purpose.”

Through the haze of painkiller induced pleasure the little raven seemed to register the gravity of his tone. “Tom? What are you talking about?”

“Nothing.” He quickly answered. “I just want to make sure that you knew. That you were safe with me. No matter what.”

Harry mumbled something sleepily, wrapped his arms loosely around Tom’s broad shoulders and fell back asleep. The dark brunet was the left with a quandary, which he ultimately solved by carefully crawling into the narrow hospital bed and lowering himself down beside him. The little raven curled into his and Tom wrapped his own arms around his waist.

He heard the footsteps coming long before their owner entered the room. Too heavy to be one of the nurses; male. Not wearing the same shoes as the hospital staff; visitor. Not moving at the constant swift clip of the surrounding medical professionals; tired. Tom raised his head just as James poked his into the room.

“You look like shite, Potter. I thought I told the two of you to go home and sleep the last time you were down here.” He growled over the top of Harry’s wild hair. “Clearly you didn’t bother to listen.”

“Riddle,” the man sounded even more exhausted than he looked, which was an honest feet in and of itself, “between the worry over both my son and a close childhood friend and what I saw last night I couldn’t sleep even if I wanted it.”

Tom huffed in response and settled closer to his mate.

“Has he woken up yet?”

“For a short while, yes. Long enough to make it very clear that he was riding the dragon and demand kisses. And pull me into bed with him.” He said. “How is Remus?”

“He lost a lot of blood but he’s stable now.”

“And you?”

“Shaken. Some minor cuts and bruises. Horrified to know exactly what it is we’re facing.”

“I can imagine that seeing the monster in the dark only makes it more frightening.”

“I didn’t get around to asking you earlier, Riddle; what happened to you to land you here?”

“Nothing nearly as harrowing as an attack by a beast of nightmare.” Tom sighed. “I finally fell victim to that one floorboard which wasn’t strong enough to support my weight; Nagini had to help me out of the hole and the doctors had to pull giant splinters out of my leg. Some nails, too. Had to get a Tetanus Shot and the like, but I’ll be fine.” He said. “Go home, James. Sirius and Lily, too. Harry is safe with me and Remus is out of the woods; even if you can’t sleep it’ll at least afford you the chance to shower and change. And eat. I’ve heard a myriad of horror stories about hospital food.”

The other man sighed and nodded, though he still looked reluctant to leave. “Lily was saying the same thing. Maybe you’re both right.” He said. “Thank you, by the way. For putting Harry up until the repairs on his room are finished.”

He smiled at that. “No thanks needed, it’s my pleasure.”

James nodded and exited the room again. He nestled down and closed his eyes; as long as the raven had a hold of him he might as well get some rest himself. That rest was cut short no more than twenty minutes later when his mater’s annoying ‘friends’ came tumbling through the door.

He suppressed a feral growl as the ginger chit popped up like something out of Whack-a-mole and pointed a finger at him like so whizzened old witch; Tom was of half a mind to expect a warning to beware the Ides of March.

“Get away from him!”

Both Ron and Hermione nearly jumped out of their skin and Harry jerked awake in alarm. “Jesus, Ginny! What the hell!”

“Whaz goin’ on?”

“Nothing, darling.” Tom quickly reassured him. “It’s merely that your…friends have arrived.”

Ron was doing his best to calm his sister down, all to no avail. Brown eyes glared at him and he sneered back as he straightened up, earning a half-awake complaint from the raven.

“What are you doing here?”

“What am I doing here? I would have though, Ms. Weasley, that the reason for my presence would be rather self-explanatory. My boyfriend is injured. I’m here to offer moral support.” The girl was nosey and annoying. He was very much aware that she’d put up cameras on his property and had no doubt seen more than she should have and knew that he’d have to take care of her eventually. But that could come after he’d ensured he’d never lose his mate again. She wasn’t nearly as important as his Legionnaire.

He straightened his clothing as he rose entirely from the bed. “I’ll leave the four of you to talk while I lunch and have some coffee. Is there anything which you’d like me to bring back for you my dear?”

The little raven seemed to be tearing up at the prospect. “I want some pudding, Tom.”

“…Ok. Chocolate or vanilla?”

Harry sniffled slightly, his vibrant green eyes downcast in what almost amounted to embarrassment. “Both.”

At the sight of his expression Tom couldn’t help but smile. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“What the hell was that, Ginny?” her older brother demanded as they hurried back down the hall, spurred on by Tom’s acidic glare. They’d spent an hour with their friend but Harry had been so loopy that nothing out of his mouth was more than vaguely coherent, so their questions regarding what had happened to him would have to wait. That having been said, neither Ron nor Hermione were impressed with her actions. “Not liking the man is one thing, but going after him for nothing-.”

“It’s not for nothing!” She snapped, pulling them both aside once they’d exited the hospital. “The twins helped me set up cameras-.”

“Ginny! That’s illegal!”

“So is killing and eating people, Hermione! And what’s even worse is that I think he’s been feeding his kills to Harry too.” She pulled her phone from her pocket and shoved it into their faces. “Look!”

By the time the video had finished both looked as if they were about to be sick; pale skinned and clammy.

“B-But…no, that’s…they don’t exist! This isn’t possible!” Despite being in denial, Hermione was fairing much better than Ron who, for the moment, seemed unable to form coherent words. “What are we going to do? What are we going to do?”

“I don’t know!” She admitted grimly, putting her phone away again. “But we have to do something; he wants something from Harry and whatever it is it can’t be good. We have to find some way to stop him!”

“W-Well,” Ron squawked, barely able to overcome his fear, “aren’t werewolves allergic to silver? That’s how it works in the movies, right? And…if one of them exists than there has to be more, so maybe there are people that know how to kill them.”

“Oh, Ronald, don’t be-! You know what, never mind! This entire situation is ridiculous! Werewolves exist, apparently, and Harry’s dating one, so why not werewolf hunters as well! It can’t possible get any *more* unrealistic!” She threw up her arms, eyes sparking and already bushy hair sticking up even further in her agitation. “How do you suggest we go about finding these people?”

The Weasley siblings exchanged looks. “Isn’t that what the internet is for?”

The Order of the Phoenix

The deafening tones of Big Ben reverberated throughout the entirety of London, bouncing off the cobbled ground and the stone walls of the courtyard of the Victorian abbey, making it seem as if the sound was pressing in on him from all sides. Wind blew, heavy with the scent of the river Thames and the rain which threatened from the roiling grey clouds overhead. His black cloak billowed imperiously behind him as he covered the last few yards separating him from the entrance of the historic structure, exposing the weapons belt and array of silver around his waist to the eyes of anyone who might happen to be passing by though at that time of night it was highly unlikely that anyone was there.

The Order of the Phoenix had been headquartered there since only a handful of years after its formation in circa 1530, when the Wolf Hunters had been absorbed-alongside numerous other entities-into the Catholic Church. He, Severus Snape, had lived there since the day he was born and had been a member for almost as long. His parents had been killed by Tomar Ridal when he was barely five. He'd spent every waking hour since either training to battle the 'Alpha of Alphas' or hunting him down, up until the point where he'd picked up and left the country without a trace.

Not a single one of them had even the slightest clue where the progenitor of the Werewolf Curse had gone. Needless to say, that made efforts to put the bastard down infinitely harder. Severus Snape was *not* a happy man.

He took the stairs up to the Abbey's entrance two at a time, passing below the phrase 'Gladius Ad Noctem' embossed in gold over the door just as rain began to fall. The massive room which opened up before him, despite having long since been repurposed, still maintained the same smell it had had during its days as a hall of worship: christening oil, incense smoke and standing water. A woman with dyed purple hair came rushing up to him a split second later, tripping over her own feet and only narrowly avoiding crashing to the ground.

This was not what he wanted to have to deal with just after returning from a nearly month-long hunt for Fenrir Greyback up in Scotland. "Nymphadora." He drawled, ignoring the glare she sent at him for daring to address her by her much despised first name. "Is there something I can help you with? If this is another example of an urgent need for an 'exclusive' brand of hair dye in some other ridiculous shade I suggest that you ask Shacklebolt to chaperone you instead because I haven't the patience or time."

"Ridiculous shade of hair dye? Some of us like bright colors, Severus; wearing something other than black all of the time might help you to loosen up a little bit." She huffed at him and ran a defensive hand through her violently violet spiked hair. "Albus wants to see you: we've gotten some information about a wolf that's been attacking people in Alaska. Were contacted by some kids from the area just after you left. He refused to send anyone but you; you should really go and speak with him."

He dismissed the younger Hunter without another word and strode passed her down a branching hall, headed straight for the office of the Order's leader. Albus Dumbledore was, beyond and doubt, the oldest man that he had ever met-beaten only by Ridal, but he didn't consider him to be a man any longer-but despite his age was still incredibly fit and energetic. Though he'd never seen him on a hunt himself.

Unsurprising, given the fact that his beard was nearly long enough to trip over and would be a liability in any fight he did get into. He looked up at him when he entered, pale blue eyes twinkling over the rims of his crescent moon glasses.

"Severus, my boy, you're returned. Did the hunt for Greyback go well?"

"Yes and no." He said. "I put Lestrange and Dolohov down but Greyback got away."

"I'm sure we'll corner Fenrir soon. He won't be able to run forever." He pushed a small bowl of candy across the desk towards him. "Lemon drop?"

Snape pretended that the other man hadn't offered. "Nymphadora told me that you wanted to see me. That there were reports about a string of attacks occurring in Alaska?"

"Indeed," the aged man gestured to the chair in front of his desk. "Have a seat, Severus."

If only to speed matters along, he did as he was told.

"We were contacted almost a month ago by a Ms. Granger and a Ms. And Mr. Weasley, informing us that a werewolf had been attacking people in their town-Godric's Hollow-and that their friend was unwittingly dating the beast. The name of that friend is Harrison Potter, and he has black hair and green eyes."

The younger man immediately stiffened, his black eyes narrowing. "Ridal."

Dumbledore nodded slowly. "Yes. And I have reason to believe that this Harrison isn't just another substitute. And for that reason I did not call you back early."

"But if he is Harrison, the *real* Harrison, he'll surely try to turn him come the next full moon." Albus, that's three days from now! To stop it-!"

"You're not going to stop it."

"*What?*" Severus demanded, leaning forward in his chair abruptly. "You're going to let it happen? Condemn the boy to the curse! I'd have to put him down alongside Ridal!"

"It is for the greater good, Severus. A necessary sacrifice." He opened a drawer and lifted out a narrow wooden box, setting it down atop the sturdy piece of furniture. "Tomar Ridal is a monster born from hatred. Only love can bring him down. And the Curse will only end when he is at rest, not merely defeated or killed. And he will not leave this world while Harrison remains." He opened the box and shifted aside the silk wrappings, revealing the ancient silver dagger nestled inside. "The curse is a relic of a world which no longer exists. And the ties which bind Tomar and Harrison together were forged of powers we no longer understand, much like this dagger. He's innocent, that's true, and it's unfortunate but it must be done." He

lifted the blade from its box and held it out to him, the age-dulled moonstone set deep into the pommel gleaming in the low light of the candles “Your flight leaves in seven hours.”

The column of the passenger jet’s body seemed to close in around him like the grasp of a predatory beast, invoking a sense of claustrophobia which he’d never known himself to have. The seat beside him was empty, thankfully, but the thin separation of leather and foam between him and the metal skeleton of the chair and the angle of its back did nothing to make him any more comfortable. The sunlight had been blinding when they’d departed from London-Heathrow, so he’d lowered the screen over the window to spare himself the headache but the near total darkness hadn’t stood a chance against the pressure of the aircraft’s departure from earth and he’d been left with one regardless. The strangled jets of air which managed to squeeze through the inflamed necks of the spigots above were overly chilled and smelled suspiciously like rotten fruit.

He’d been unable to find a chance to sleep the night before, the haste to pack the necessary supplies to take down a wolf like Tomar and to read up on the full details of the situation hadn’t left him the time, and the fact that the change of time zone meant he was repeating a day did nothing to help his state.

He was utterly exhausted and could only hope and pray that jetlag wouldn’t eat the eight hour reprieve he had between his arrival in Godric’s Hollow and the meeting which the order-or more accurately the meddling old coot himself-had arranged with the party responsible for reporting the activity in the area in the first place.

He made it off the plane and through the baggage claim in record time, and after a short taxi ride and near wordless exchange of cash and found himself with keys to a room in what almost amounted to a roach motel. All that mattered was that the place had a livable promptly after dropping his bags in a heap by the door.

His dreams were disjointed and made little sense; all that he could remember from them was a boy whose only discernable features were raven hair and emerald eyes that glared at him, spindles of red unfurling from the black pupil, and mocked him by endlessly parroting Dumbledore’s favorite line: ‘for the greater good’ as blood dripped from the cursed wound in his shoulder.

He woke up in a cold sweat with half an hour to spare before he had to leave; the majority of that time was spent either staring at the far wall in an effort to reground himself in reality or enduring the shower’s lack of any water above the temperature of ice. Tomar’s attacks had been reported by Harrison Potter’s friends, no doubt in a desperate effort to save the boy from the monster’s clutches. Dumbledore had sent him to answer their hopes by sacrificing him to take down the ‘greater evil’. He’d been damned if his conscious wasn’t chewing him to ribbons, as evidenced by the surreal horror he’d suffered through minutes before.

But what else could he do, having been sent alone to face the Alpha of Alphas? Tomar Ridal had, on two occasions, torn through the armies of the Roman Empire. He was stronger, faster

and older than any other wolf. Entire squads of Hunters had been thrown at him, and they'd all been ripped the shreds. The only way he'd be able to stand the slightest chance against him would be to sneak up while he was distracted. And that was the real reason he'd been sent in alone.

The old codger could claim a hope that vengeance would bring him some peace all he bloody wanted. All that it really meant was that he had no choice but to follow his orders and all that he could do now was hope he'd be able to kill Ridal before the curse could set in; that way Harrison wouldn't have to die on the altar of the 'greater good' alongside the feral menace.

Snape turned off the water and exited the shower, pulling out the clothes that he'd brought with him. He would have preferred to wear the standard Order garb but Godric's Hollow Alaska was a small town and wearing such a thing around wouldn't be wise for a number of reasons: not only would it cause the locals to regard him as some sort of sideshow tourist, it would alert his target to his presence. And Tomar knowing of his presence there was the last thing he wanted.

The suit which he wound up in didn't exactly help him much with the first problem, but the locals could think whatever they wanted of him. He wouldn't be sticking around long enough for it to matter anyway. And as long as he could claim he tried it didn't matter, at least so far as the Order of the Phoenix was concerned.

He didn't even bother attempting to wear the tie, leaving the devilish piece of fabric to the mercy of whatever small creatures no doubt lived within the walls of the room.

The location where the meeting had been arranged to take place turned out to be a small coffee shop, and on entering he was soon confronted by the sight of three teenagers clustered around a rickety table with worry clear on their faces.

"You three are the ones who called?"

"Oh, um, yes." The brunet girl was the first of the group to speak, though something about her expression made her seem as if she was still struggling with the reality of the situation. "You're Albus Dumbledore?"

His thin lips twitched down into a brief frown. "No, I'm not the one you spoke to when you contacted the Order. I'm simply the one he sent to deal with the matter." He said. "Severus Snape; I've a history with this wolf in particular."

"Hermione Granger." She said.

"Ron. Ron Weasley." The young man mumbled, his face aflame with a copious amount of freckles and his blue eyes unable to hold his piercing gaze for longer than a second.

"Ginny," the red headed girl, Ron's sister judging by the resemblance, had no such reservations. "I'm the one who recorded the video which we sent to the Order. I thought that there was something off about Tom since the first day we met him and took advantage of their absence during a hunting trip to set up cameras on his property. Riddle showed his true colors when he thought he was alone."

He sneered, sliding into the empty seat to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to himself. "If you were on his property, he knows. And if he's met you before he'd be very much aware of exactly who it was that was responsible. The only reason he hasn't done something about it is because he doesn't consider you worth the effort. Not at the current time, at least. Too much of his focus is centered on your friend."

All three of them perked up slightly. "You know what he wants with Harry, then?"

"Tomar is very old and Harrison is who he's been looking for for thousands of years. He is his, to use wolf terminology, mate."

"So he's not going to hurt Harry?"

"No. He's going to do much worse than hurt him." All three paled at his words. "He's going to turn him, but the curse can only be transmitted when the moon is full. I believe that's why he broke into his home after attacking his father, Godfather and their longtime friend; he wished to destroy Harrison's current 'pack' before turning him. Had he not run out of time he'd likely have gone after you as well."

"D-Do we…need to be concerned he'll hunt us down tomorrow night?"

"No." He said. "Failing once will have agitated him passed the point of no return. He'll curse Harrison and then pick the lot of you off at his leisure. Potentially with his help; becoming one of them…needless to say, he'd no longer be who you know."

"What are we going to do?" Hermione demanded; for the time being, at least, she seemed to have regained a hold on her 'suspension of disbelief'.

"*I* will-."

"Listen, you may be the professional but we're not going to sit on our thumbs! Harry is our friend, my best friend, and we aren't just going to leave saving him up to some dour Git we don't know. Even if he has handled these things before."

Seems that the boy had a spine after all. Snape narrowed his eyes at the ginger but, surprisingly, he didn't shrink back like the Wolf Hunter had expected. Civilians and Werewolves was an equation that always amounted to trouble, but then again…he needed all the help that he could get with this job. "You might be useful but only if you follow my orders. *All* of them, without question. Is. That. Clear?"

All three nodded without a word.

"We'll meet again tomorrow night, about an hour before midnight; Ridal, Riddle as you refer to him, won't make a move before then."

"How can you be certain of that?"

Snape was now beginning to question whether Weasley or Granger was the more annoying. "Because turning Harrison isn't the only thing he intends to do to him; he all but certainly has plans to perform an ancient binding ritual as well."

“Ancient binding ritual?” Ginney repeated, expression caught between confusion and horror as countless horrible scenarios played through her head. “To what purpose? What would it do?”

“Bind them, though that should be obvious Ms. Weasley.” He drawled. “As for its purpose: a Pagan marriage.”

Borasca

The loose rocky soil shifted under his feet as he ran kicking up pebbles and filling the night air with the smell of grit and mud. The dark trees around him were silent as they loomed close, their inhabitance silenced by the presence of the beast snapping on his heels as completely as if someone had pressed a mute button on their TV. His chest ached, his throat red raw as he gasped for air running as fast as he could up the sloping hill with the hilt of the dagger he clutched cold in his hand.

Up. Up. Up. His feet slipped multiple times and it was a miracle that he didn't fall. If he had, the monster on his heels would have caught him for sure.

Just when he thought that he couldn't climb any further the mountainside flattened out into a large open ledge. Before him rose the gaping maw of the mountain, the rotted through boards hammered into place across it sticking out at ragged angles like broken teeth. An ancient looking sign hung crooked above the shaft reading Jezt's mine, and painted across it in faded red letters was the word BORASCA.

"Harrison!" The same broken snarl that he'd heard it speak in when it broke into his room. It spurred him forwards despite his exhaustion, burning chest and aching limbs. "Harrison!" The boards were so rotted through that they broke on contact with his body as he barreled through them. The shaft was damp and cold and the moist air rested heavy on his skin. The small puddles of water splattered across the ground splashed loudly as he ran deeper into the mountain. Ahead of him the shaft crumbled into a gaping hole bridged only by a decaying wooden pylon. In the bit, sixty feet below him, he could make out the numerous stake-like stalagmites rising from the bottom, glistening with water and thick veins of silver ore.
*"**Harrison**!"*

He jerked awake and opened his eyes, blinking blearily up at Tom who stood over him at the foot of the bed. His garnet gaze appeared to be concerned, but he couldn't clearly make out his features when his glasses were still sitting on the nightstand.

"Tom?" the raven questioned, the raised hairs and goosebumps along his arms slowly beginning to settle. "What happened?"

The brunet exhaled in what almost amounted to relief and handed him his glasses. "I heard you thrashing around from downstairs and came up to wake you. You were having a nightmare." He gently ran a hand through his wild black hair.

That was a bit of an understatement. What he'd seen wasn't too terrifying in the grand scheme of things but the adrenaline and overall disorientation of the situation had left him feeling extremely off balanced and confused.

"Nightmare, yeah. You could definitely call it that." He said, sliding the sight aid back into its proper place on his face. "What's a borasca?"

“A borasca?” Tom looked at him oddly. “Why are you asking me about the Spanish word for squall?”

“Because I saw the word in my dream; it was painted on a sign hung over a mine shaft.”

The confusion remained on the older man’s handsome face for a moment longer before a look of realization and understanding passed across it. “With a bit of context it makes more sense. In mining terminology it refers to a mine which has been abandoned, usually because it’s underperforming due to running dry collapsing or having otherwise been made too dangerous to continue to use. Might I ask what a mine, abandoned or otherwise, was doing in your dreams?”

Harry shrugged. “Your guess is as good as mine. But, then again, when do dreams ever make sense?”

Tom hummed, leaving his position at the foot of the bed and crossing to the window instead. “When indeed.” He threw the curtains wide and gazed smugly out at the moon, barely visible in the still bright sky. “The full moon will be beautiful tonight.” He said, offering no other explanation despite the raven’s raised eyebrows. “Come downstairs, my love. Dinner is ready.”

“Sounds good; I’m starving.” Pausing only long enough to straighten his clothing into something presentable, Harry trotted after Tom back down the stairs and into the kitchen. The brunet had set the table, arranging fine china and positioning a lit candelabra in the center alongside a bottle of wine. Harry raised an eyebrow as the older man walked up behind him, pulling his smaller form against his chest and burying his face in his hair. “Wine?”

“Of course.” He purred, squeezing him gently. “Tonight is to be special, as it is a special occasion. So why not splurge a bit on wine, hmm?”

“Why is it a special occasion? What’s going on?” Was it Tom’s birthday? Was it an early celebration for his own birthday? Was there a holiday which he’d forgotten about? Was there a holiday he’d never heard of before? Maybe something Pagan? The brunet smiled instead of answering and brushed passed him. “Come on, dove. The food it getting cold.”

Harry, still brimming with questions, followed him further into the kitchen. Tom both pulled out and pushed in his chair for him. The food was a great deal more elaborate than anything that he’d ever made for him before.

“You didn’t have to do this, Tom.” Harry said after ten minutes had passed; he’d finished his water but hadn’t touched the wine yet.

“I know that I didn’t but I wanted to. Tonight is important; you’ll see why soon.”

“…” aware he’d be getting nothing else out of him Harry sighed. “It’s delicious.”

“Glad you think so. Drink your wine.”

He picked it up and took a drink. The room immediately began to go slightly fuzzy around the edges; people weren't kidding when they said that wine was stronger than beer.

"Can I ask you something, dearest?" the brunet reached across the table, tilting his cup upwards to make him drink again. "Please answer honestly."

"What's wrong?" it was very hard to focus now. The room had started to spin.

"Were I to turn out a monster, would it affect how you feel for me? Would you run screaming or would you still be able to love me?"

"Of course I'd still love you because you'd still be you." His hiccupped, blinked and shook his head in an effort to clear it. This action quickly became one that he regretted as it made him feel worse. "Tom, I-I don't feel so good."

"You'll be alright. Just keep drinking."

His voice was all that he had left to cling to in an ever deepening fog. As he lifted the glass to do as he'd been told his vision caught the thin film of powder floating at the bottom and his sluggish mind clicked over. He raised his head to meet the smirking brunet's ruby gaze.

"You drugged me." Moments later he was lying on the floor, his vision spiraling into black.

The three teenagers were jittery and that did not bode well; it was an hour to midnight, informing them on how to use the weapons they'd be given would take about forty minutes and travel from their meeting point to Hill House where Tomar had made his den would take another ten. Already the night wasn't shaping up to be anything good.

"Have any of you ever used a crossbow before?" all three exchanged a glance which plainly answered the question for them. Snape resisted the urge to sneer. "Have any of you ever used a gun? Rifle? Bow?" Another moment passed before Ron hesitantly raised a hand, going pasty white when his gaze settled on him like stone. Snape all but threw the weapon at the red head; he caught it against his chest on reflex and nearly toppled over.

"A crossbow?" Granger piped up, eyeing the primitive firearm dubiously. "We're going to fight a seven foot tall wolf monster with a piece of equipment from the Middle Ages? Why not a gun? Wouldn't that be better?"

"No," he told her dryly. "The only material that affects his kind at all is silver. And if you knew anything about the compositions and softness of metals you'd be aware of the fact that silver doesn't hold up well when used to make bullets. A lot of Wolf Hunters died while the Order learned that lesson."

He pulled a pair of standard knives from his belt and handed one to each of the girls, along with vials full of an opaque purple liquid.

“Knives: silver. Wolvesbane. Throw it at Ridal should he get too close to you; harmless to humans aside from the fact that it’s highly toxic, but will act as a powerful acid to any werewolves which come into contact with it. Hence the name.” He said. “Though I doubt you’ll find the need to use either of them, as all three of you will be focusing on rescuing your friend and will leave fighting with Ridal to me.”

Both girls nodded wordlessly while Ron fiddled with the workings of the crossbow in his hands; the trigger released with a loud twang, the bolt narrowly avoided clipping Snape’s shoulder and slammed into the trunk of the tree.

“O-Oh…that’s how it fires.”

“Weasley!” The boy jumped so badly it was lucky that the crossbow had already gone off. The Wolf Hunters yanked the bolt out of the tree and thrust it back at him. “Are you able to properly handle that weapon without shooting one of us in the back or do I need to give that to your sister instead?”

The boy shook his head. Hopefully he wouldn’t end up regretting the decision to leave it with him.

“Spend the next twenty minutes learning to hit what you aim at; hopefully you won’t prove too dim to be able to shoot that tree on purpose.” He said. “As important as it is to put a stop to Ridal as quickly as possible you’ll be of no use unable to use it.

The next twenty minutes passed agonizingly slowly, with the Wolf Hunter alternating between watching the red head attempt to improve his aim while being lectured on technique by the girls and glancing at the clock.

At twenty minutes to midnight and with the sun all but vanished from the sky they began to make their way towards Hill House. They made their way towards Hill House. They made the trek on foot, not wanting to alert the wolf to their arrival with the sound of an approaching engine.

In the dying light Hill House looked more ominous than ever before. There was a candle burning on the sill of the attic window and the wolf’s massive truck sat quiet in the driveway. Sitting on the porch, almost as if standing guard was Nagini.

“What are we going to do about Riddle’s dog?” Hermione hissed from where they stood just out of sight of the porch. “That thing barks at everything it sees!”

“The only way to get passed her is to kill her.”

“Kill her? But she’s only an animal! Even if she is vicious and we do need to get passed her I’m not sure that killing an innocent dog is-.”

“That, Ms. Granger, is *not* a dog.” Snape told her grimly. “That is the Demon which Tomar invoked for his revenge. And it’s anything but innocent. Make yourself useful, Weasley; with any luck you’re competent enough to hit the thing.”

“F-From here?” Ron had gone from white to green, no doubt for fear of what would happen if he missed.

“If you don’t think you can hit it from here, Ron, then move closer; there’s a small copse of trees right over there that should give you a good enough angle to hit her.” Ginny said, gently pushing her brother forward. “We need to get to Harry; he’s alone in there with that monster and God only knows what that thing is doing to him.”

The reminder of his best friend’s distress seemed to be the spur the red head needed to begin creeping towards the copse of trees, all be it at a near snail’s pace. Everything went to shit about half a minute later when he stepped on a fallen branch. The wood shattered and the dog’s head snapped around.

Amber eyes caught them a split second before the dog leapt to her feet and, instead of barking or growling and well before any of them could react, let loose with an awful spine-chilling shriek that surely wasn’t natural. It were as if total silence fell across the entire town, but that only lasted a brief moment before he black pelt split along her back and fell to the wooden porch with a heavy thump. The creature it revealed resembled a dog only vaguely: its body seemed to be made up entirely of bare muscle and bone, a ridge of spines ran down its back and its paws had been replaced with a fan of curving coal black talons the length of carving knives.

Snape swore viciously and ripped a sword from his belt as the nightmare beast bounded off the porch.

“All three of you stay back!”

Harry jerked awake to a horrible sound which didn’t have a place anywhere outside the deepest circles of hell. He tried to jerk upwards from the chair which he’d been propped up in only to nearly topple over. His hands were tied behind his back with thick ropes. His shirt had, at some point prior while he’d been unconscious, been removed.

Tom had drugged him. He was in the attic, the small cramped room lit only by the flickering candles set up around the room and the full moon which spilled in through the dusty window.

“It would seem that we have wedding guests, come to wish us well on this our night of matrimony. How…quaint.” His voice was laced with a thick sneer. Caustic in the severity of its derisiveness. “Nagini will take care of them. There’s no need for us to concern ourselves.”

Harry squinted through the thick gloom, the light spilling through the window directly in front of him-broken up by the branches of the tree just outside-could only do so much for his already terrible vision, and managed to locate Tom standing at a table a couple of feet in front and to the right of him.

Along with the typical scents of dust and dry wood the attic air smelled of numerous herbs and incense. The table was strewn with an assortment of odd objects, chief among them a bowl of hammered gold set in the center of a ritual circle traced in charcoal. Most of Harry's attention was caught by Tom's attire; a wolf pelt was slung across his shoulders, the head pulled over his curls like a frightful hood, and nothing beneath but a pair of deerskin trousers.

"Awake at last, my love? It would seem that I misjudged the dose; modern medicine truly is a fickle thing. It was so much simpler before nature was pushed aside in favor of 'technology' but you and I both know what they say, I'm sure: adapt or die." He said, still not turning towards him. "I'd begun to fear that you'd miss our entire wedding. There's only the final binding left."

He wrenched the athame out of the wood and cut his palm; dark red blood welled and dripped loudly into the bowl, already filled with what he could only guess from the smell was wine. It was only then that he turned and approached him, handsome features set into a coldness which he'd never seen before. Harry was more concerned with the weapon in his hand, the blood still on the blade staining its leading edge a sinister crimson.

"T-Tom." He whimpered, eyes wide as his feet pushed against the flood. A useless scrabble against the old wood in hopes of scooting the chair further away. He'd never been anything but gentle before. Had promised that he wouldn't hurt him. So surely he wasn't about to slit his throat now.

"Shh." He reached out a hand to cup his face; his fingers were longer than they should have been and ended in pointed claws. His features no longer looked quite…right. "Did you not hear me when I told you what I'd do? When I said, just moments ago, what tonight was? I only need a few drops of blood to finish the binding, and then forgiveness for the pain I've no choice but to cause you. You'll hate me for a time but that won't last forever." His hand traveled down the column of his throat; he wasn't certain if the accompanying shudder was from fear or pleasure. "You won't be able to resist your alpha for long, my precious little mate."

All along the monster had been him. Tom Riddle. Tomar Ridal. It all made so much sense and Harry, hissing in pain when the blade cut his hand to drip blood into the bowl, couldn't believe that he hadn't been able to put it together before.

'Were I him, I'd renew the ceremonial marriage and then make you like me. Because then we'd both be immortal and you'd be with me forever; we'd never have to lose each other."

Harry would be lying if he said there wasn't a small part of him that desperately wanted that. To be with Tom forever. Immortal. Young for all eternity. To be cared for by the brunet for the rest of time. To travel the world with him and run with him at night.

But the price was too high. Even if he would be different once the curse took hold, even if resisting meant losing Tom, he wasn't willing to exchange that future for further bloodshed.

Not that there was anything which he could really do to save himself, what with his being tied to a chair at the mercy of a centuries out *Werewolf!*

Tom tipped his head back and drained half of the bowl of wine and blood. The other half he forced on Harry who swallowed only because he didn't want to risk what the brunet might do to him if he tried to refuse. He chuckled and stroked his cheek again.

"Good boy, my love. You won't have to be tied up much longer." He uncoiled the pelt's front paws from around his neck and tossed it aside as the wrongness of his features became more pronounced. "This will all be over soon."

Harry looked on in horror as he fell to his knees, his legs warping as his heel stretched up towards his knee and his ribcage rounded outwards. The ridges of his spine shifting along with the muscles which slithered beneath his skin. Alabaster flesh split, revealing thick dark fur matted down with a layer of blood.

The most nightmarish part of the transformation was Tom's face, and despite the horror Harry couldn't help but stand transfixed. His ears had sharpened to points and now stuck up from his hair which had gone from immaculate to shaggy and long. It were as if an invisible hand were yanking his jaw outwards, transforming it into a long muzzle filled with teeth. His face finally peeled away, revealing the wolf hidden underneath.

The massive beast rose to its full high and stared down at him with burning eyes and drooling jaws. Harry had never felt so terrified before in his life. His heart was pounding out of his chest as it moved towards him, its hot coarse fur and wiry whiskers brushing against his cheek and ear.

"Hold still. I don't want to hurt you more than I must, little mate."

The raven barely had the time to take a hitching breath before its jaws snapped shut on his shoulder like a bear trap. Incredible pressure registered briefly before its teeth broke his skin and the pressure was replaced by an incredible pain. Harry screamed, his body writhing in a desperate effort to free itself which only wound up hurting him more. Tom snarled low in his massive chest and bit down harder. The window, finagled open with a branch broken off from the tree that she was sitting in, flew open to reveal Ginny on the other side.

"*Hey dog breath!"* Tom released him and whirled around in time for the vial she'd thrown through the window to break against his muzzle. Glass and droplets of a strong smelling fluid flew in all directions. Tom bellowed in agony, clawing at his face and chest where the fluid had stuck him in an effort to remove it, and barreled clear through the wall disappearing deeper into the house. Ginny was through the window seconds later.

"Harry!" She ran up to him and quickly cut his hands free with the blade in her hands. Not a pocket knife, utility knife or even a hunting knife but rather a dagger. Where the hell had she gotten her hands on that?

"Ginny! What are you doing here? What did you throw at him?"

"I'm here to save you, idiot, and I'm not alone! Ron and Hermione are with me-the twins helped as well-and we've gotten so professional help."

Professional help? Did she mean the Wolf Hunters which Tom had briefly mentioned during his 'story'? "But what did you throw at him?" Had it been acid? He hoped not. Twisted as it was, he still cared to much about the man-beast?-to want him to suffer like that.

"Wolvesbane." Ginny grabbed his hand and began dragging him forwards. "Come on."

He dug his heels into the floorboards and yanked her to a stop. She spun around to glare at him, silently demanding an explanation. "Ginny, no! He went that way!" He must have looked ridiculous, or at the very least a fright, pale as marble and covered in his own blood.

"It's the only way we're getting out of this house, Harry, because you're in no state to be climbing down that tree!"

She was right. He knew that she was right. And he didn't like it but they didn't have a choice.

They bolted out of Hill House at full tilt, nearly tumbling down the stairs, and only narrowly avoided slamming into an unfamiliar man with a beak like nose. His hair was long and lanky and as black as the clothing he wore; a glittering belt of silver blades hung around his hips. In the yard lay a four legged pile of meat which he assumed had once been Nagini.

He caught Harry as he nearly tipped but released him abruptly when he yelled in pain, the fingertips of his leather gloves stained in his blood.

"You've been bitten." A statement, not a question. The answer was obvious and the younger raven didn't bother to address it. The older male didn't seem bothered by this reaction. "The only chance you have is if we kill him quickly."

Without warning the man grabbed him again, pulling him against his chest and pressing the largest dagger on his belt against his throat. Contact with the metal burned like fire but his whine of pain and fear was drowned out by a furious guttural snarl from just out of sight in the darkness. Show yourself, Ridal. Come out or you watch him die again!"

"Spill even a drop of my mate's blood, Snape, and I'll wipe the 'Wolf Hunters' from the face of the earth!"

"*Come out!"*

Harry's heart had begun to hammer again. This man wasn't really going to kill him, was he? With this…dagger which happened to look exactly like one from his dream, right down to the age clouded stone set into its pommel. He could clearly remember exactly how that narrow hilt had felt clenched in his hand as he'd run towards that mine.

He needed to go there, *now*. Harry had no idea why but he was suddenly overcome but the undeniable urge to go there. Up that mountain. Into that mine. His body acted before his brain had time to catch up; a massive surge of inhuman strength knocked the man off balance and he wrenched the dagger from his grasp before bolting off the porch.

"Harry!" His name was shouted in five voices; Tom's, his friends' and the Wolf Hunter's. Heavy paws thudded just behind him but he didn't look back, not wanting to see the monster

which his lover had revealed himself to be. He threw himself into Tom's truck and slammed the door behind him, locking it with one hand and fumbling for the keys which he knew Tom left in the cup holder with the other. Harry grabbed them and forced them into the ignition, slamming on the accelerator just as Tom landed on the hood with a crash.

The great wolf toppled over with a howl as Harry peeled out of the driveway and onto the street. Driving purely on instinct, hoping that he'd manage to find his ultimate destination. Was Tom still behind him? He had no way of knowing. There was nothing in his rear view mirror but an empty road and his own reflection; spindles of red, like the color of Tom's own eyes, had spiraled out from his pupils and now marred his once emerald irises.

Harry picked up the other object which Tom had developed the habit of leaving in his truck; his cellphone. Without removing his eyes from the road he dialed the familiar number and listened to it ring a few times before the other end was picked up.

"Dad." Damn it all that he was becoming emotional now. Tears blurred his vision as he drove one handed with the dagger pinned to the wheel, a combination of shock and sadness and burning pain.

"Harry? You don't normally call me while I'm at work. Is something-?"

"Please, just listen." Something about his tone must have tipped his father off to the fact that something really was wrong. James repeated his name in a much grimmer tone but said nothing else. Harry quickly pounced on the opportunity and forged onward with his explanation. "Jezt's silver mine. The borasca. I'm headed there now in Tom's truck; I have a knife and I'm almost certain that he's chasing me. I'm going to end this."

"End this? Tom's…a knife? Harry-!"

"I'm sorry. Tell Mom I'm sorry. And Sirius and Remus too. I-I really do love you all I just…I don't have a choice. He's bitten me. I have to stop him. I love you both."

"*Harrison-!"*

He hung up before his father could say any more and threw the phone out the window when it started to ring. Harry turned left. Then right. Then left again. The road began to slope upwards. Another fifteen minutes passed before he came to where the little road dead ended, narrowing into a steep rocky path which was a familiar as the dagger.

He didn't put the truck in park or bother with turning off the engine and hit the ground running. The raven only made it a handful of paces before the question of whether or not Tom had followed him was answered.

The werewolf exploded from the undergrowth and came tearing up the hill after him, dirt and rock spraying in all directions. Harry had never run so fast before in his life, the shot of pure adrenaline which raced to his legs overcoming the exhaustion and blood loss that had left him weakened.

It was nothing short of a miracle that he didn't trip and fall; if he had the frothing beast on his heels would have caught him for sure.

He could see it now. The sign over the mineshaft which read out that one word. Borasca. Like in his dream the wooden boards gave way at the blow from his body. Like in his dream, the cold heavy air rested against his skin. Like in his dream the decaying pylon spanning the gaping hole loomed from the darkness before him.

He only slowed to a stop once he'd reached the center of the beam, the ancient wound sagging beneath his weight but not breaking. The dagger smarted in his grip; it felt as if he was holding onto a white hot poker but he had to grin and bear it. It was the only weapon that he had. Tom skidded to stop at the edge of the shaft, snarling at him before managing to form words.

"Harrison, drop the dagger. Throw it into the shaft and come back to me."

"No!"

"Harrison, come back to me!"

"Never!"

"You're going to fall!" The wood was emitting low cracks below his feet. Rather than allowing it to frighten him back to the solid ground, and Tom's grasp, he moved further back. The wolf snarled and leapt forward to grab him and pull him to safety but their combined weight was too much for the rotted wood.

It snapped in half and both of them were falling. Tom's howl echoed off the closed in stone walls of the shaft. The frigid air whipped passed him. Harry's fall was broken by a narrow ledge jutting from the wall, saving him from the stone spines which lined the bottom. Unconsciousness rushed in before any pain could truly register.

He didn't know how long he'd spent out cold but when he woke up his entire body felt as if he'd been thoroughly clubbed with a metal bat. Harry felt around for a moment before finding the dagger again and sitting up. Slowly, so as not to further exacerbate his injuries he was sure he had.

"Harrison!" Tom's voice came out as a weak wheeze, laced with obvious pain. It sounded like he'd been calling for a while. "H-Harry! Dove, answer me, please!"

"Tom." His own voice sounded horribly loud in the confined space as Harry peered over the lip of the shallow ledge. "Where are you?"

"Down." Was the strained reply. "Stuck. Help me!"

The raven clenched the blade between his teeth and clambered down the ledge as best he could, cautious to avoid the numerous stalagmites which came up to almost the center of his chest. Tom had not been so lucky as Harry with his landing. He'd shifted back into his human

form, and the stalagmite which had pierced his stomach was coated in blood. His eyes were wide and desperate, pleading with him for help.

“Little mate.” Dark red blood welled between his lips when he spoke, misting his chin and trickling down his cheek. “Please.”

“Tom.” He knelt beside him, struggling to steel himself against the desire to pull him free of the stone and the empathy for his pain as he reached out to cup his face. “I’m sorry, but this has to end Tom. This has to end.”

“Did you lie to me, little mate?” one of his shaking hands reached up to clasp his own. His palm was cold and slick with blood. “You told me that the truth would change nothing. That you wouldn’t stop loving me if you knew.”

“I did say that. And I didn’t lie to you because I won’t. I’ll never stop loving you Tom.” Harry said. “But that doesn’t mean I’m not going to stop you.”

He gripped the dagger in both hands, gritting his teeth against the pain from the metal. The silver blade glinted in the low light as he raised it over his head.

“Harry.” Tom’s voice was barely audible now as the ore laced spine sucked the strength from his body. He tried to push against his arms but was too weak to keep him at bay; he knew it. There was as much resignation on his face as fear. “Little mate, please! Don’t do this!”

Tom choked as the dagger sank into his chest, arms falling heavy to the shaft’s stone floor and his eyes rolling back into his head. Revealing the white behind the red. After almost three thousand years, his curse had finally come to an end.

Harry had to brace himself against his cooling body to pull the dagger free. The point was slicked in blood as it rest against his own chest, sharp enough to break the skin with only the slightest pressure.

“I’m right behind you.”

They’d only made it a mile on foot in the direction they thought Harry had gone before James had showed up, the lights of his cruiser chasing the darkness from the street. They’d piled in and set out after the raven, his father demanding information from anyone and everyone as they drove in between explanations of his own. That Harry had called him. Had told him where he was going and why. He was panicked, that was clear, in the way that only a father could be.

The half hour drive up to the mine was incredibly tense. They expected to find the area outside the mine deserted, or at the very most occupied by Harry and Tom, but what they found instead was a young woman in a silver dress who had seated herself in the bed of his truck, her bare feet hanging over the side. Her hair was long and pale blonde in color and her

eyes were large and blue. Perhaps the oddest thing about her was the fact that she was accompanied by a pair of massive wolves; a black one whose head rested in her lap like a tame dog, peaceably accepting her stroking hand, and a brown one which snorted at them as they approached.

The black wolf whined and the woman reached back to tug gently on its scruff. “The Gulping Plimpies I had following you have made sure I knew exactly what you were up to, Tomar. You’ve caused them enough trouble for a life time; they don’t mean Harry any harm.”

The shock of the sight of her had left the mall stunned; Severus was the first to recover, eyeing the wolves and the woman with a pointed caution. If she noticed she didn’t seem bothered by it; her dreamy expression didn’t falter and she removed her hand from the brown wolf’s pelt to push her hair back over one pointed shoulder.

“Might I ask who you are and just what it is you think that you’re doing out here?”

“What am I doing out here? Not much of anything, really. I just came to collect the Alpha and his mate; he’s been gone for a very long time-a Demon used his pain to blind him-and his mate left to find him after he couldn’t take waiting any more. He’s needed back at White Paw Wash; the pack has missed them both.” The smaller black wolf leaped up into the bed of the truck and slipped passed her to press closer to the other. The brown wolf immediately adhered itself to the other, tucking its smaller form against its side. “As for who I am, I’ve had a lot of names throughout the ages. Most of those have been forgotten now. You can just call me Luna, if you’d like.”

“Luna.” James repeated, finding his voice but still seeming bewildered. He was staring at the pair of green eyes which peeked out at them from behind the brown wolf’s back. “I… wolves…my son…?”

“Oh, these two aren’t wolves exactly. That’s just the form they think they have. Or wish to have. One of the two. They can change it if they like but I think they’re happy like this for now.” Her dreamy expression didn’t falter in the slightest as she scratched behind both their ears. “I’ll be leaving with them now; it’s been too long already since they’ve been home.” Luna slid out of the bed of the truck and brushed the dust and wrinkles off the skirt of her dress. “You’ll find them up in the mine; you should leave them together though. It’s important mates not be parted. Also, do mind the Wrackspurts; they seem to have developed a horrible infestation of them up in the rotting wood in the mine. And do remember that just because someone is dead doesn’t mean they’re gone; it’s more of a beginning than an end.”

Humming softly under her breathe Luna skipped away into the dark trees, the two wolves following behind her. The black wolf looked back at them once before disappearing.

Little time was spared standing there after the trio had vanished from sight. The little group scrambled up the hill and the two adults rushed into the unstable shaft of the abandoned mine. Their progress ended when the earth opened up into another, vertical shaft. Not that they needed to go any further. Their search for the pair came to an end at the bottom of the shaft; Tom, impaled on one of the stalagmites, lay in a pool of blood with Harry slumped across his chest, the glittering blade of the dagger he’d stolen protruding from his side.

There was a quiet splash as James' knees hit the flood, his head falling into his hands. Snape stared down at the scene below without expression: Tomar was finally slain, Harrison was dead as well and Dumbledore had gotten what he wanted. And now, almost certainly, any attempts at retrieving one or both of the bodies would end in failure.

It seemed an eternity before the other man finally brought himself to return to his feet, trudging out of the mine and back down towards the cruiser to use the radio inside. He watched the three teens follow him, asking questions that went unanswered before finally resigning themselves to standing by and drawing comfort from each other. It was almost dawn, now, and his work in Alaska was finished.

With one last brief glance at the mine which had become a monster's tomb Snape turned and started back down the road.

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